This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600010208H

32.
462.

THE

# CHURCH OF GOD,

IN

## A SERIES OF SERMONS.

BY THE

REV. ROBERT WILSON EVANS,

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

Pax cœlestis civitatis ordinatissima et concordissima societas fruendi Deo et invicem in Deo.—AUGUSTIN. CIV. DEI. xix. 13.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., CORNHILL.

MDCCCXXXII.

462.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY BRADBURY AND EVANS,
BOUVERIE STREET.

# PREFACE.

FOUR of these Sermons have already appeared in print. They were fragments of a whole which the author had then in contemplation, and has now completed: of course they have undergone considerable alteration, in order to adapt them to their places, as dependent parts. It has been the author's endeavour to discuss his subject with as close a reference to practice as it would allow, and therefore he has dispensed, as much as possible, with dissertation, especially after the necessary preliminaries have been discussed.

MAY, 1832.

# CONTENTS.


## SERMON I.—INTRODUCTORY.

ON THE OBJECTS OF REVELATION, AND ON THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT SHOULD BE RECEIVED.

PAGE.

1 Cor. ii. 14.—But the natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned . . . . . 1

## SERMON II.

ON THE ORIGIN AND CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

Heb. xii. 22—24.—But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly of the church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel . . . . . 38

PAGE.

SERMON III.

ON PROPHECY.

PSALM CXXX. 5.—I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope . . . . . 69

SERMON IV.

ON SCRIPTURE.

2 THESS. ii. 15.—Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle . . . . . 98

SERMON V.

ON SCRIPTURE.

2 TIM. ii. 15.—Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word . . . . . 123

SERMON VI.

ON SACRIFICE.

JOHN i. 29.—The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world . . . . . 150

SERMON VII.

ON THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

HEBREWS iii. 1.—Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus . . . . 174

PAGE.

SERMON VIII.

ON PRAYER.

REVELATIONS i. 5, 6.—Unto him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever . . 197

SERMON IX.

ON REPENTANCE.

EZEK. xviii. 27.—When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive . 219

SERMON X.

ON THE STATE OF A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

ROM. iv. 3.—Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness . . . . 239

SERMON XI.

ON THE ANALOGY OF THE NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

1 PETER i. 23.—Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever . . . . . 263

SERMON XII.

ON THE REWARD OF OBEDIENCE.

LUKE xxiv. 21.—But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel . . . . 284

PAGE.

SERMON XIII.

THE PROFESSION OF A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

HEB. iv. 14.—Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession . . 308

SERMON XIV.

ON THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY IN THE CHURCH OF GOD.

1 COR. ii. 2.—For I desired to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified . . . 326

SERMON XV.

ON THE COMPARATIVE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE EARLIER AND LATER CHURCH.

EPHES. v. 15, 16.—See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil . . . . . 351

SERMON XVI.

ON THE FORTUNES OF THE CHURCH.

LUKE xxi. 28.—And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh . . . . 375

# SERMONS.

## SERMON I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

ON THE OBJECTS OF REVELATION, AND ON THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT SHOULD BE RECEIVED.

1 Cor. ii. 14.

*But the natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.*

The natural man here mentioned by the Apostle, is a title which will apply to two classes of mankind. It may designate either those who, left entirely to their own faculties and notions, derive no knowledge whatever of God from Revelation; or those who, living under the blessings of a Revelation, think and act just as if it had never reached their ears—who, reckless and unconscious of the light

which it has afforded, even to themselves in despite of themselves, attribute such knowledge as they have of heavenly things to mere force of human reason, and set down the revealed mysteries of God as the discoveries of inquiring man. With the former character, it is our supreme blessing not to be immediately concerned: in the latter, our interest is close and painful. It encounters us continually both from without and from within. It is not confined to the immoral and the thoughtless professor of the Gospel, but attaches itself more or less to all who have not perfected their faith; to all who, not having as yet completely ascertained, by study of the Word, by enquiry into their own hearts and understandings, and by a comparison of the results in each case, the whole sum of what they have owed to God's special instructions, and, insufficiently humbled, persist in claiming for their own self-acquired knowledge, one iota of his blessed Revelation. Who must not plead guilty here, if he but diligently discuss his past and present frame of mind? For the more we think the more we find ourselves beholden to it, and the less therefore to have been hitherto our sense of its exceeding value. Alas! we are too apt to forget the Giver in the enjoyment of our bodily blessings; but still less lively is our sense of his extraordinary

intervention displayed in the possession of our spiritual; if thanksgiving be too often neglected after earthly food, still more frequently is it omitted after heavenly. We need not go far for the reason of this perverseness. The former class of blessings contains the supplies to the primary wants of our animal nature, their renewal is continually sought by its appetites, they are necessary to its very existence; hence they obtain the earnest attention of our mind, ever rousing it and keeping it alive by their palpable obviousness and continual repetition. But the character of the latter class is just the reverse of all this. The daily bread which they supply is not necessary either to the existence or enjoyment of the body; it is spiritually taken, and, therefore, the want of it can be discerned by such only as have become conscious of their spiritual nature, and accordingly grown desirous of satisfying its cravings. It is not, therefore, until our spiritual man hath at least gained one victory over our natural, hath entered the house and bound the strong man who had us in possession, that the occupation of our attention can be vindicated, and our minds left free to the solicitation of the nobler blessings. Then, indeed, searching the resources of our own minds within, appreciating their supplies from without, we arrive at the vital

distinction between what we know of God and things appertaining to God, by mere force of our natural unassisted powers, and what by means of his extraordinary illumination. Then we daily grow more acute in the discernment of this difference; until in the end, with a strength of conviction which the wise of this world may call bigotry, and with a depth of humiliation which they may term abjectness, we clearly perceive, and frankly acknowledge, ascribing glory and thanks unto God the Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, our Saviour, that from our own selves we know nothing of heavenly things, but that from him, and by the mercy of his special intervention with our fallen nature, we derive every and the least particle of our knowledge of him as he really is.

But how many, professing the name of Christ, have fought and won this glorious victory? how many have even ever bethought themselves of the necessity of the struggle? Alas! the natural man, in the second sense of the word, is but too common a character in the visible church of God. Indolently succumbing to his animal nature, he passively acquiesces in the results of his education and experience: a series of notions on high and awful subjects have become familiar to him, and both pride and ignorance conspire to lead him to

regard all familiar truths as the property of his own mind. These, according as he is content to take his place amid the crowd, or is ambitious of the character of a philosopher, he throws into the common mass of first principles and incontestible axioms, or places among the sure deductions of human reason: hence much unconscious practical infidelity, and hence, alas! some avowed apostacy. To nature is ascribed what nature could never give, and to God are refused acknowledgments for what God could alone bestow. On the very threshold then of addressing to any Christian body an investigation into the nature and properties of the church of God, we find it necessary to ascertain the point at which its extraordinary supply of knowledge, meeting the deficiencies of our nature, comes in aid of our ordinary information. The discovery of this will disclose at once the special blessedness and high privileges of which we are too apt to be unconscious. Thus we shall see the utter destitution of the natural man, and the unbounded wealth of the spiritual man. Thus we shall learn duly to value the waters of our unearthly Jordan, and, with the fastidious daintiness of the Persian king, to drink of one river only,—spiritual kings from a spiritual river. Thus we shall duly appreciate the milk and honey of our holy land; and, contrasting its glorious

abundance with the scanty springs, the bitter wells, and the palling food of the wilderness, in which our natural man was so long wandering, tempting and grieving God, we shall joyfully advance with his pillar of light in our front, explore still further, still more carefully, and finally find therein our everlasting habitation.

The necessary objects, therefore, of a Revelation from God, or, in other words, the fundamental principles of his church upon earth, require our present discussion. And for this we have most ample materials provided. Not only have we the result at which our own minds, well explored and carefully abstracted from the associations of revealed truth, can arrive, (how does the very difficulty of the abstraction display the abundance of God's mercy!) but we have at the same time the results which the most gifted minds of former days obtained, in such a search—minds, these, unfettered by the associations which ours find it so painful to throw off. The ancient philosophers were men placed in very different (and, for the mere present purpose, in very advantageous) circumstances from ourselves. They had been violently driven by the superstitions, with which religion had been overlaid, to forego all tradition, in which channel alone, however corrupt, God's Revelation could have reached them,

and to yield themselves unreservedly to the deductions of their natural unassisted reason. If then, having laid down the questions which it must be the prime object of moral and intellectual man to solve, we have reason to conclude, from the examination of our minds, that they could never of themselves have obtained the solution; and if, further, those men failed also, and came grievously short of the end, notwithstanding an enviable possession of all human acquirements which would seem requisite for the end; although they were the lights of their several ages and countries, and, earnestly bent upon the discovery, engaged head and heart in the service; although they were sages, whose acute understandings, refined by severest discipline, and unremittingly employed in pressing on to the furthest limits at which the light of nature was visible, left unexplored no attainable point in things and relations, human and divine;—if this shall be our conclusion, then we shall have determined the objects of a Revelation from God.

Notwithstanding all the discussions upon the supreme good, we may safely pronounce, that the universal desire of mankind is, to be released from the perplexities and apprehensions attendant upon their view of death. In this view are terminated

all their hopes and fears. All the sufferings of the body, all the reverses of life, are secondary to this last of sufferings, this last and greatest of changes. The living principle within men is continually whispering, (and making up for argument by perseverance,) that there is something beyond the grave, and the pangs of the dissolving body are as nothing in the scale, weighed with the anxiety and doubt attendant upon the thoughts of what may await us beyond. To trample, therefore, under foot the insatiable grave, to take the sting out of its terrors is his grand moral endeavour. To ensure this triumph, he puts on all his intellectual armour, and gives the keenest edge to the sword of his understanding. Now this, his prime object, steadily followed up, will involve him in the following questions:—

First, Finding himself, in common with all around him, subject to a perpetual, invisible, invincible controul, he has here discovered the arbiter of life and death; the properties, therefore, of this influential being, and the various relations existing between these, and such as belong to man, are to be sought out.

Secondly, These being found, must be the means (if there be any) of determining the question of death, whether we be concerned in any state beyond it, or not.

Thirdly, Supposing the belief in a future state to be the result of this inquiry, then follows the anxious question, whether this state have a retrospective view to our conduct in this life, and shall be happy or miserable, according as we have been good or wicked.

And Fourthly, If such a future state be credible, then may there not be a hope afforded to imperfect man, that, as in the case of retribution in this life, repentance may procure remission of punishment.

Such is the series of questions, the solution of which touches the highest interests of man. In other words, they are, the attributes of God, the life and judgment to come, the forgiveness of sins. These, therefore, if they shall appear incapable of proof upon any ground of human reason, will be the grand objects of a Revelation from God. The Deist no doubt will smile to see placed to this account, truths which he reckons so obvious to reason. How obvious they are, let him judge, when he has entirely stripped himself of all the prejudices of an education in a Christian country: how obvious they have been, let him consider, when he turns over the pages of the most subtle reasoners of antiquity. We will now briefly examine them, in order.

On the subject of the attributes of God, it is necessary to attend to a distinction, which has been too seldom kept in sight. They form two separate classes, according as we consider God to be the physical creator and maintainer of the universe, or to be its moral governor. These bring us into very different degrees of intimacy with him; and the discovery of the one class is very far indeed from introducing us to the knowledge of the other. The confusion of them has led to much undue stress being laid upon natural theology, (the real value of which, however, I would be the last to decry,) and lies, indeed, at the bottom of all infidelity.

Let us then, in the first place, suppose that, by comparing the appearances and operations of the sensible world with the effects of his own powers and faculties, the natural man, ascending to a first cause, has established to his entire conviction the certainty of the existence of a sole, almighty, all-wise, all-good, everlasting Being, the maker of every thing in heaven and earth. To this, as the arbiter of his fate, as the creator and maintainer of his life, as the author of all its blessings, he will reasonably offer praise, adoration, and thanksgiving (Rom. i. 21). Now had man continued in his innocence, this knowledge had plainly been quite sufficient: all of which he knew was good: evil was

unknown to him. His blessed state therefore required not the notion of God's attributes as a moral governor, who in him had as yet no sin to pity, to pardon, to rebuke, or to punish. But very different, alas! is the case with fallen man. He knows evil; he is surrounded by it on every side, in every shape of sin, and death. What comfort shall he derive now from the contemplation of this being? The more he contemplates him, the further he finds himself removed from him. If he look up to heaven, there he sees world beyond world intervening between; if he look down upon earth, there he finds beneath him world below world (even until it be contained in a drop of water) interposing, and blocking up his way in this direction. He finds himself shrunk up into a point amid infinity. How shall he have intercourse with a being, which thus recedes as he advances, and whom he finds, at the end of the furthest possible pursuit of his intellect, more remote than ever? How shall he assure himself of the sympathy of such a being; how shall he refer his practice to this obscure and distant abstraction, this occupant of his head and not of his heart; what chords of relation shall he draw to connect the weakness, the folly, the unholiness of man, with the perfect power, wisdom, and goodness of this being? Alas! the loss of

innocence! how utterly did it sever the links of communication between God and man. Fallen man finds a lamentable change in himself, which requires a corresponding change in this unchangeable being, in order to maintain any connexion with him. Looking up from his dungeon of bodily and mental anguish, perplexity, and despair, he desires the interference of some superior being, who may so far resemble himself as to pity him, to pardon him, to do him right. He longs to discover a moral governor of the universe, to whom he may appeal for support amid such intolerable evils. And now how shall he proceed? Shall he invest this being with attributes derived from perfect human government? So say his feelings: but what says his reason? Will an abiding and rational conviction (and without this there can be no faith, no religion) give testimony to this yearning? Will reason allow him to invest with the attributes of man this being, which continually recedes further from him at every approach which he essays? She rudely repelled him on the very steps of the entrance into the sanctuary. She coldly asked him how to this sole perfect being he could ascribe qualities which owe their existence (as far as he knows) to the mutual dealings of imperfect beings? How shall he ascribe to him mercy, of which man could never have formed the notion,

much less exercised the quality, had he not been an offender? how imagine the combination of perfect justice and perfect mercy, (for in a perfect being both these must be perfect,) when the more perfect we conceive each to be, the more irreconcilable do they appear? How attribute to pure mind qualities which our experience denies to exist apart from body? If man, either not consulting, or not following reason when consulted, gave vent to his feelings, and invested this being with moral attributes, the consequences were such as always result from withdrawing the latter from the regulation of the former. Human vices soon come upon the list of attributes, and at last quite thrust out the virtues. God became, in human notions, a powerful, but evil and capricious, being; and thus in the end "he changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things—they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever." If, however, the man of reason started from this dream of absurdity into which he had been betrayed, and turned aside to the investigation of the divine nature, he met with no better success. He enquired, was this being pure mind, or compounded of mind and body? The

first supposition was to him inconceivable, and, as to any practical purpose, unavailing. He had recourse therefore to the latter, and thus God, after all, was an animal! The most rational of such as adopted this monstrous supposition, conceived the universe to be the body through which the divine mind was diffused. This Pantheism, by deifying parts of the whole, brought the philosopher back to his old prison-house, the polytheism of the vulgar, and thus he also, "thinking himself wise, became a fool, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man." Thus the attributes of God as moral governor of the universe, being undiscoverable by human reason, are known to man by Revelation alone.

But, in the next place, these being unknown, it is quite impossible that he can proceed to the knowledge of the life and judgment to come. Nor were these points ever seriously entertained by the ancient philosophers; such as gratified their natural longing after immortality by specious conjectures, unable to admit the separate existence of mind, (however separate in nature from the body,) considered the human mind as a portion of the divine pervading mind, and held, that to this, after the dissolution of the enclosure of the flesh, it became reunited. On this ground they readily built the doctrines of pre-

existence and transmigration; but the preservation of the same individual consciousness after death, a point so necessary to a state of future retribution, was anything but a necessary consequence of this hypothesis.

The natural man's ignorance of God's moral attributes, is at once fatal to the reasoning of certain Deists, who, having recourse to the consideration of the unequal distribution of good and evil in this life, assert it to be imperative upon God's justice to correct this in another life, and thus imagine that reason has proved the doctrine. Were we even to grant them the knowledge of those attributes as founded in reason, they would even then be unable to prove their point; for they must prove that the above inequality is real, and not apparent, which is contrary to the known fact, that no wise and good man would at any moment exchange his condition, bodily and mental, with another. They must shew us that the good and evil implied in this argument are intrinsically good and evil, since some sages have denied them to be such, and others allowed them to be but trivially such; and they must shew why this corrective life must needs be immortal, instead of the same length with the original life.

It is true, that a belief in a future state has pervaded all ages and all countries. But this fact, to

position was to h
ractical purpose
erefore to the
n animal! 'I
his monstro
be the h
diffused.
e whole,
rison-ho
he also
hange
imag
ributo
eing
man
next
le that he
and judg
eriously
as gratifi
by specio
te existen
rom the
ortion of
o this, aft
esh, it beca
the

[redacted]e most obvious to our faculties; had it [redacted]aken for granted, as a matter of course, by [redacted]o deny the grounds on which Revelation [redacted],—that is on the satisfaction of Christ; had [redacted]een the main link, or rather the only one [redacted]onnects God and man.

[redacted]ived as our sense of this attribute is from [redacted] dealings, we must suppose it to be called [redacted]in God by the same cause as in the most per- [redacted]nan,—that is, by repentance on the part of the [redacted]der. But what, excepting a familiarity through [redacted]teen hundred years, with the joyful proclamation [redacted]their mutual relation, could have led men to think [redacted]t the connexion between the two was necessary [redacted]d demonstrable, and to mistake for cause and [redacted]t what God's good pleasure alone, and this [redacted]specified grounds, has made constant conco- [redacted]s? The demonstration attempted by the gain- [redacted]f Revelation, proceeds through a long array [redacted]ises, which can never be granted by reason. [redacted], that an infinitely holy being like God, [redacted]d may) have a kind consideration for [redacted]as offending man: that his love [redacted]fter its only conceivable object, [redacted]have [redacted]bliterated: that [redacted]n objects [redacted]le justi[redacted]y

which, after all his attempts at demonstration, the philosopher was compelled to appeal, needs only shew that it has been revealed at a period before mankind was divided into nations and distant lands; and indeed, it seems a moral impossibility, that a doctrine touching our welfare so vitally, presenting the ultimate object of all hope and fear, applicable to an event daily suggested to the mind from sights without and feelings within; which so continually receives apparent confirmation from the spectral illusions of our imagination; which reconciles us at once to the seemingly unequal distribution of the good and evil of this life, and thus particularly interests the poor and the afflicted, who always form the great mass of mankind,—it seems impossible that such a doctrine, once established by Revelation, should ever, in any very material degree, be forgotten. We have thus produced the second object of Revelation.

On the third head we might have spared all discussion, since it is a question of one of God's moral attributes, and therefore undemonstrable by reason. We should, therefore, have here dismissed it, had it not been not only the principal attribute in which we are concerned, but also the most remote from our apprehension; had it not been the most familiar to us in Revelation, and therefore been deemed by the

heedless the most obvious to our faculties; had it not been taken for granted, as a matter of course, by those who deny the grounds on which Revelation places it,—that is on the satisfaction of Christ; had it not been the main link, or rather the only one which connects God and man.

Derived as our sense of this attribute is from human dealings, we must suppose it to be called forth in God by the same cause as in the most perfect man,—that is, by repentance on the part of the offender. But what, excepting a familiarity through eighteen hundred years, with the joyful proclamation of their mutual relation, could have led men to think that the connexion between the two was necessary and demonstrable, and to mistake for cause and effect what God's good pleasure alone, and this upon specified grounds, has made constant concomitants? The demonstration attempted by the gainsayers of Revelation, proceeds through a long array of postulates, which can never be granted by reason. They assume, that an infinitely holy being like God, must (and not may) have a kind consideration for so unholy a being as offending man: that his love must needs remain after its only conceivable object, man's innocence, shall have been obliterated: that love enlarged to infinity must thereby take in objects unworthy of it, while justice enlarged to infinity

which, after all his attempts at demonstration, the philosopher was compelled to appeal, needs only shew that it has been revealed at a period before mankind was divided into nations and distant lands; and indeed, it seems a moral impossibility, that a doctrine touching our welfare so vitally, presenting the ultimate object of all hope and fear, applicable to an event daily suggested to the mind from sights without and feelings within; which so continually receives apparent confirmation from the spectral illusions of our imagination; which reconciles us at once to the seemingly unequal distribution of the good and evil of this life, and thus particularly interests the poor and the afflicted, who always form the great mass of mankind,—it seems impossible that such a doctrine, once established by Revelation, should ever, in any very material degree, be forgotten. We have thus produced the second object of Revelation.

On the third head we might have spared all discussion, since it is a question of one of God's moral attributes, and therefore undemonstrable by reason. We should, therefore, have here dismissed it, had it not been not only the principal attribute in which we are concerned, but also the most remote from our apprehension; had it not been the most familiar to us in Revelation, and therefore been deemed by the

heedless the most obvious to our faculties; had it not been taken for granted, as a matter of course, by those who deny the grounds on which Revelation places it,—that is on the satisfaction of Christ; had it not been the main link, or rather the only one which connects God and man.

Derived as our sense of this attribute is from human dealings, we must suppose it to be called forth in God by the same cause as in the most perfect man,—that is, by repentance on the part of the offender. But what, excepting a familiarity through eighteen hundred years, with the joyful proclamation of their mutual relation, could have led men to think that the connexion between the two was necessary and demonstrable, and to mistake for cause and effect what God's good pleasure alone, and this upon specified grounds, has made constant concomitants? The demonstration attempted by the gainsayers of Revelation, proceeds through a long array of postulates, which can never be granted by reason. They assume, that an infinitely holy being like God, must (and not may) have a kind consideration for so unholy a being as offending man: that his love must needs remain after its only conceivable object, man's innocence, shall have been obliterated: that love enlarged to infinity must thereby take in objects unworthy of it, while justice enlarged to infinity

which, after all his attempts at demonstration, the philosopher was compelled to appeal, needs only shew that it has been revealed at a period before mankind was divided into nations and distant lands; and indeed, it seems a moral impossibility, that a doctrine touching our welfare so vitally, presenting the ultimate object of all hope and fear, applicable to an event daily suggested to the mind from sights without and feelings within; which so continually receives apparent confirmation from the spectral illusions of our imagination; which reconciles us at once to the seemingly unequal distribution of the good and evil of this life, and thus particularly interests the poor and the afflicted, who always form the great mass of mankind,—it seems impossible that such a doctrine, once established by Revelation, should ever, in any very material degree, be forgotten. We have thus produced the second object of Revelation.

On the third head we might have spared all discussion, since it is a question of one of God's moral attributes, and therefore undemonstrable by reason. We should, therefore, have here dismissed it, had it not been not only the principal attribute in which we are concerned, but also the most remote from our apprehension; had it not been the most familiar to us in Revelation, and therefore been deemed by the

heedless the most obvious to our faculties; had it not been taken for granted, as a matter of course, by those who deny the grounds on which Revelation places it,—that is on the satisfaction of Christ; had it not been the main link, or rather the only one which connects God and man.

Derived as our sense of this attribute is from human dealings, we must suppose it to be called forth in God by the same cause as in the most perfect man,—that is, by repentance on the part of the offender. But what, excepting a familiarity through eighteen hundred years, with the joyful proclamation of their mutual relation, could have led men to think that the connexion between the two was necessary and demonstrable, and to mistake for cause and effect what God's good pleasure alone, and this upon specified grounds, has made constant concomitants? The demonstration attempted by the gainsayers of Revelation, proceeds through a long array of postulates, which can never be granted by reason. They assume, that an infinitely holy being like God, must (and not may) have a kind consideration for so unholy a being as offending man: that his love must needs remain after its only conceivable object, man's innocence, shall have been obliterated: that love enlarged to infinity must thereby take in objects unworthy of it, while justice enlarged to infinity

must not include objects which are deserving of its animadversions; that God's justice, assumed here to admit of satisfaction from men, can receive in compensation from the offender any thing which is not God's already: that a principle which has its very foundation in the liability of offending and offended man,—to change their relative places, and in the assurance which the penitent gives of future security to the offended, must be applicable to the relations existing between two parties, one of which is infinitely holy and infinitely powerful: that the amendment of the life future must influence the character of the life past: that the doing our duty through a part of life, must be equivalent to doing it through the whole: that the means of making reparation must always continue, though the objects of our offence are daily vanishing from this fleeting world, and our condition is never the same: that (lastly) analogy,—in such cases as the present of peculiar moment,—is in favour of their argument, while it is, on the contrary, directly opposed to it. For when we look on the face of the world, do we not continually observe that no tears of repentance, however sincere; no pangs of sorrow and contrition, however sharp, can avert or even arrest the penalties which men have incurred in the body? we see disease incurable, poverty irremediable, disgrace

irreparable. To all this we may add, that were a principle, important as this, so obvious to human reason, we ought surely to meet with it in the writings of the ancient moralists. Nowhere, however, does it appear. In this, then, we have the third object of Revelation.

But there remains another point still, and as yet unadverted to, because it is only after having had these three secured and certified to us that we discover the necessity of a Revelation of God upon it. Our very riches open our eyes to our poverty, just as our learning does to our ignorance. This point is the assurance of God's grace to help our infirmities. We remarked how man shrank into a point on the contemplation of the intellectual and physical attributes (so to call them) of God. What, then, shall he appear, upon the contemplation of his moral attributes, to which he is now introduced? In the former case, we confess our utter insignificance; we are humbled at the nothingness of our most boasted power and intelligence; we cry out, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou regardest him?" But in the latter case, we are brought down to a strain of humiliation far lower than this; we have to confess utter unworthiness, to acknowledge the want of holiness and goodness; we cry out, "God be merciful to me a

sinner." There our understanding was humbled, and we sank in the scale of intelligent beings; but here our heart is arraigned, and we sink in the scale of good beings. From this despair God's forgiveness raises us. But will this satisfy us now? God, in the revelation of his moral attributes, hath opened our eyes to the dazzling riches of moral excellence; he has awakened our hearts to aspirations after its attainment. And has he admitted us to this view only to gaze and despair? Hath he given us light and life, and yet condemned us to the scale, in the spiritual world, of the periwinkle on the rock, helpless and motionless? No! Here, for the fourth time, hath God intervened with his gifts of glorious mercy. He hath bidden us be holy as he is holy; he hath commanded us to be conformed to his own image, as expressed in his blessed only begotten Son. And for this he has promised us the help of his grace; he hath revealed to us its exceeding riches, and unsearchable means.

Such are the objects of a Revelation from God. In making, however, this statement, we readily allow, if we have not implied, that there are certain grand truths in harmony with our nature, which alone can satisfy its insatiable craving, and they are signified generally by our faculties and

feelings in our various guesses, desires, and aspirations. But what they are particularly, God, and not man, must shew, since they require for their certainty not only a strict inquiry into our own minds, but also a free revelation of God's. When, therefore, by God's goodness and mercy they are discovered to us, we joyfully hail and accept them, on his authority; we eagerly grasp them as the thing so much wanted, and now at length found; as changing into a definite and stable hope, an indefinite and uneasy longing. Then we find that all our previous mental wants, and guesses at the objects which should satisfy those wants, have been but false notes, struck here and there around the true. This master-note we were unable, after long-repeated endeavours, to hit of ourselves. But as struck for us by our Heavenly Teacher, our ear instantly recognizes the desired sound, and the harmony, so long sought in vain, has become complete. Now all is peace and content ineffable. For all the horrid and distracting confusion of means without objects, and of objects without means; all the sense-bewildering storms of unaccountably opposed good and evil; all the tempests of pain and sorrow, and roar of the grave, have been rebuked into order, and calmed, at the voice of our almighty, all-wise, all-merciful Master.

Oh! Members of the Church of God! Consider the abyss of darkness from which the announcement of a few propositions hath delivered us. Think of our bliss in having for a guide the certainty of Revelation, and not the disputable questions of philosophy. Even the heathen may teach us something here: for if he felt so thankful for the doubtful glimmer of this latter; if he could perceive a warmth imparted from it amid most heart-chilling troubles, public and private, so as to call it the consoling light of life, how ought we to hail the full blaze of brightness which the former has poured around our paths. Can we think seriously enough, feel deeply enough, be diligent enough, be thankful enough? Let us but call to mind those moments when we have assuaged some nighly overwhelming pang of sorrow, by the balm of the hope of the everlasting bliss hereafter; confronted some peril or terror in joyful resignation into the hands of a just and merciful Father in heaven; relieved a burdened conscience by confession to a forgiving God: then let us ponder and consider what had been the agony, not of the moment, but of days and years, yea, even of a whole life, had we never known those stays and comforts which Revelation has supplied, had this life of sorrow been all, had God's love never been declared, had guilt been inexpiable? When we talk, amid our

sorrows and wrongs, of a just and kind Father in heaven, and of a better world to come, let us remember how and from whom we have learned these things; call to mind from whom and for how long they were hidden; consider where are our merits for which we have been thus preferred, the meanest of us in virtue and talent, to the brightest examples of both in ancient days. Can we, dare we, remain indifferent to so great salvation? Be assured that in the moment that we lose the consciousness of God's unsearchable mercy to us here, we are spiritually dead, even as our body is dead when it ceases to be conscious of the light, and the heat, and various fostering influences of the outward world. Our neglect has no excuse; our responsibility here goes far beyond that which we incur on any other point. Are men deemed excusable, are they not daily condemned by us, who neglect their natural faculties, although, from intimate and habitual possession, and from the power of improving them which we feel that we possess, we are too much accustomed to think them our own property, with which we may do as we please? At all events, we do not ascribe them to any special interference of God. Can we then, without condemnation, slight the possession of knowledge and power of understanding which God, by clear and special

intervention, hath superadded to these faculties, in order to give them point and direction, and contribute to our eternal well-being? and this, too, when the voice of history has declared, our daily experience has shewn, and His holy word has earnestly warned us, that, without this direction, they will be so misemployed as to be a stumbling-block instead of a guide, and darkness instead of light? Men do not, in their sober senses, turn away from the wholesome fruits of the earth and all its bounteous repast, and attempt to nourish their bodies with poisonous herbs, or wood, or stone. And as little claim shall we have to the possession of right reason, if we spurn the thoughts which God hath specially set down as its natural food for our mind's healthy entertainment, and seek to batten upon the vanity of mere human learning, and worldly elements. But beyond all predecessors in the church of God, the Christian is inexcusable, if he forget or neglect the blessings of Revelation; for the unveiling of mysteries, hidden from the beginning of the world, has been reserved for him; on this youngest and most favoured child the Father hath poured out all the treasures of spiritual knowledge, emptied them to their inmost cells. He hath not only promised, but performed; not only told, but exhibited. Jesus Christ, his only begotten son, being the visible image of Him whom

no eye can see, hath expressed and declared him. Jesus hath wept, hath healed, hath blessed, hath forgiven, hath raised from the dead, as being God,—hath risen from the dead, as being man. Thus, by a clear exhibition to our senses, by a direct appeal to our heart, and not by mere information to our understanding, we have been assured of the grand points of Revelation, and had their bearings and importance exemplified before our eyes.

Two mistakes are committed in the treatment of Revelation. Some go in curious investigations beyond it, and endeavour to fill up chasms; as, for instance, that intervening between God's foreknowledge and men's freewill, which Revelation having left, no additional aid from reason can ever fill up; every load of argument which it throws in sinks down into an unfathomable abyss; every structure which it attempts to throw across, only projects sufficiently to shew the man, who uses its frail stage, the horrible depths below, while he still looks in vain for the other shore. But the number of such persons is inconsiderable, compared with that of such as come short of Revelation, and never was this short-coming so grievously prevalent as in the present times. Through the abundance of information poured around, men's minds are, as it were, in a tropical clime, where labour seems equally needless and burdensome. The vain

presumption of knowledge prevents men from discerning their ignorance, puffing them up with a pride which will not stoop to be informed, and unnerving them with an indolence which will not strive to learn. Hence, in common with all the rest of their information, their religious belief (if such can called a bundle of opinions about which the owner is indifferent) is no longer, as in better days, a clear stream pouring from one head, and proceeding to one point. It is a muddy stagnant pool, passively receiving any chance-coming feeder, which the abundance of the rains may cause to flow for an hour or two, turbid with particles of earth. Here, therefore, it has inevitably received a portion of natural knowledge; there unconsciously, and from mere chance of proximity, a part of revealed knowledge. And these are promiscuously taken in with utter recklessness of inquiry into the real deficiency of the one, and the real plenitude of the other; or into the foulness of the one and the purity of the other. To such persons, all opinions on religion are indifferent, and an opinion at all upon religion, whatever it may be, passes with them for religion. Meanwhile the deep and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, its unbending and peculiar articles, are treated as dogmas of the schools, not as objects of belief to society; as debateable grounds for the theologian, not a base of

principles to the layman. Laxity of opinion, in any case, is a wretched imbecility; in religious matters it is not only this, but also a moral delinquency. In contrast to such conduct, let us be careful to seek out and accept the whole of Revelation, to drink the whole of the cup of salvation which God hath so bounteously put into our hands, nor to rest satisfied with the taste on the lips of that which he designs to pervade the whole body with life and heat. Half of truth is inevitably accompanied with a corresponding half of error, so that the whole shall be pernicious. We can yield no obedience to God's will, repose no faith in his promise, arrive at no correct understanding of his word, if we suffer either indolence, or pride, or any corrupt affection, or worldly occupation, to stop us midway in our course. We must go, if we would be safe, to the full extent of all the knowledge which God hath thought fit to communicate. How else can we discern its real importance? Will the sight of a few bricks give us any idea of the house? How, without feeling, within ourselves and of ourselves, its importance, can we give it its due and lofty supremacy over all the other notions and affections of our minds, making it a master amid servants there, and thus employing it in its high and proper office of a ruling principle, in which the

whole body of our thoughts and feelings shall find a head, and all grow up unto the fullness of the image of God?

A common excuse which men provide for their laxity of opinion, and utter indifference in forming it, is the variety of creeds adopted in the Christian world. This fact is greedily caught up by all the superficial, by all the indifferent, by every gainsayer of the faith. The Bible, it seems, is an unsorted heap of dogmas, a vast magazine of the conflicting opinions of innumerable sects; its spirit is the spirit of freethinking. I would that these persons would in the first place inquire, and distinguish between creeds, which are the ephemeral mud-nurtured spawn of our own luxurious and sunny times,—which have enervated the mind and made it at once ignorant and rebellious, indolent and unsteady; and creeds which have grown up amid blood and persecution, when able and learned men were compelled to concentrate all their intellectual powers, and give up all their hearts and minds to that word in whose truth alone they could find rest or happiness. How beautifully harmonious in all essentials are these latter; what an unity of spirit do they breathe under such manifold varieties of men, of customs, of countries, of circumstances. I would that in the

next place they would seek and distinguish essentials from accidentals. The former must ever be the same, the latter will depend upon times and circumstances. These, rated at their highest, can be nothing more than the limbs of the outward body, which may be absent without any loss of life, without the least detriment to mental and spiritual vigour, though not to comeliness and usefulness. But those, like the parts of the inward body, the lungs, the heart, and the rest of the vitals, are such, that if one be absent or imperfect, the whole body must perish. The sign of the cross may be retained or rejected; but the divinity of Christ cannot be asserted or denied. And woe to him who quotes variety of opinion on the former question, to excuse his indifference to the latter.

On a wise and ingenuous mind, the sight of such varieties, so far from producing the effect of indifference, will rather impress an earnest desire to seek for himself, and search into the whole truth. Therefore, my brethren, let no indolence dissuade us from this; let no worldly business or pleasure distract us from this. Let us begin it with a pure, earnest, and humble heart, so that no caprice or predisposing affection shall direct us exclusively to one point,—so that no perverse vanity shall prompt us to lay undue stress on any part, which shall thus overthrow the

just balance of the whole,—so that no love of singularity and paradox shall allure us to exhibit the whole under new and unnatural combinations of parts; nor all of these, the besetting infirmities of our day, conspire to satisfy us that we have learned enough, whensoever it shall be our pleasure to leave off. Under a deep and due sense of the awful responsibility to which a Revelation from God, and, above all, that through Christ, subjects us, looking to him and not unto man, let us begin and proceed in our work, reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting. Nor let us flatter ourselves, as we discuss each point, that the opinion to which we shall come will not be momentous. A wrong opinion taken up, where God had put in our power a clue to a right, is no infirmity, but a sin, a grievous sin, involving many sins,—as perverseness, unthankfulness, recklessness, want of sincerity, contempt of God's gifts, indifference to his honour and glory. However, therefore, when we come from our chamber to the society of men, we may view with charity, yea, even with affection, the entertainers of erroneous doctrine, yet with the doctrine itself we must make no compromise, nor, like the false prophets of old, cry out, "peace, peace," where there can be no peace. A Christian's charity will lead him to think and hope the best of his neighbour, and, above all, he will fear to judge,

lest he be judged. But his love of truth, his allegiance to his Saviour, his fear of God, will not allow him for a moment to conceive, that he himself, under all his own peculiar means and opportunities, would not be in a most perilous state, were he to maintain the same opinions, or even to give them the least indulgence, when produced before him. This last is that spurious misnamed charity, and real uncharitableness, which goes to destroy two souls at once,—both of him in error who might have been convinced, and of himself who bears with that error which he might have convicted.

We are God's work, God's property, to the very inmost chambers of our mind. Him therefore must we serve, his will must we seek and obey; nor can we act according to his will in the body, without first thinking according to his will in the mind. God is not a man that he should punish the deed alone. We shall think the cognizance of all-seeing God is imperfect as that of purblind man, and shall resemble those weak knaves who reckon indifferent all which the law does not enforce, if we shall imagine that our opinions, however sincerely held, are indifferent before God. To him we must account for the manner in which they have been formed. Man punishes with his law as far as his cognizance can reach. Shall not then the supreme

Lawgiver and Governor punish to the extent of his cognizance also—that is, to the very bottom of the heart, to the inmost recesses of our understanding? What! shall He whose eye is over all be limited, like man, to the view of the outward shape in which a thought is expressed? shall he but stand outside the door to gather the overheard and doubtful signs of the iniquity going on within, having no authority to enter; or shall he not enter at once, with the scourge of vengeance in his hand? Two grand errors are continually besetting us on this point of following diligently up to its full extent a Revelation from God. One is an overweening opinion of the supremacy of our will over our understanding; the other is an under-rating of the responsibility of our understanding. The former arises from distinguishing the understanding in contrast from the heart; and because this implicitly obeys the impressions from without, while that, at the same time, is independent of them, men are led to conceive that their will, which is thus controuled in the one, has its full sway in the other. A grievous and fatal mistake this; for seldom is it the intellectual will which leads us to the choice of subjects for the understanding; and even this, however independent we may think it, may be enslaved in consequence of an improper choice. For a wrong opinion, once

adopted by the understanding, may ever after, by influencing his feelings, and administering to his passions, hold the person captive, so that he shall not command even a wish to be free. Thus the understanding may be blinded, no less than the heart may be hardened; and the one requires for its health, to be fed with right reason, no less than the other, for its soundness, with right affection. Therefore, let us beware how we disqualify ourselves for accepting in purity and fulness the Revelation of God, by tampering with this momentous faculty, by darkening this sight of the mind, by losing all use and exercise of such an instrument. Shall we be excused for incapacity of knowing God's will, when we have wilfully brought that incapacity upon ourselves? Then will the poltroon, who has purposely maimed his best limb, be excused his inefficiency for service. Gradual and most insidious are the advances of that corruption of the understanding, which blinds it to the knowledge of God. The offences and ailments of the body immediately strike and disgust the sense, and may thus raise a timely alarm; but those of the understanding unveil themselves but after a long accumulation of disease, and even then the present condition of mind and body, as being at hand, too often bears the blame of the thought, word, or deed. The understanding, from its seeming

remoteness from the scene of action, obtains an alibi. And hence it is continually allowed to sin, because it is deemed incapable of sinning.

The latter error is not less momentous. Most awfully responsible are we for the use and abuse of every faculty of mind, whose integrity may promote, or whose perversion may obstruct, our reception of so inestimable a blessing as a Revelation from God. All mankind with one voice concur in condemning the man who is heedless of natural religion, as a monster, as a wild beast, whom human society cannot away with. What ought they, if consistent, to think of him who slights revealed religion? If the Apostle has solemnly declared that men were inexcusable in neglecting to derive a knowledge of the Godhead, or in drawing wrong deductions upon the same, from his visible works, are they not much more inexcusable, who, from want of attention, or from corrupt passions, or from both, either neglect or recklessly form false notions of his written word, of his expressed will, which is not unseen, and to be gathered by a train of reasoning from things seen, but lies open and visible before their eyes? Will he bear with those for a moment, who content themselves with vague and inadequate notions of his nature and relations to man, when he has not, as of old, darkly hinted them through the ordinary operations of

Providence, but peculiarly interfered to blazon them forth by a series of stupendous signs and wonders. He has not abandoned us to cold deductions of reason; he has actually infused distinct and abiding principles into our understandings, yea, and warm and holy affections into our hearts. He has given us the whole spiritual man, and the whole spiritual man he claims from us; not the maimed, not the sickly, not the deformed, but the entire, the vigorous, the upright, in all its members and proportions; even the new man fashioned after Jesus Christ, whom he hath given us, and not after the world, which he hath bidden us renounce. Assuredly if ever, if any how, if any where, man was without excuse for spiritual ignorance, it is in these latter days, under this prodigality of Revelation, and in this Church of Christ.

The moral blessings of a Revelation have appeared in the course of our argument; but equally great also are the intellectual. In every department of knowledge there is a point of exceeding self-gratulation and delight, as well as of enjoyment of mental power; and that is, when we have arrived through the detail of the several parts to a full comprehension of the whole. It is faintly imaged by the delight of the traveller, who, having long threaded the different roads, explored the various towns and

villages, followed the different streams of a country, surveys them afterwards as one great whole, combined into one view, from the commanding summit of a mountain. He then sees the bearings which had before perplexed his ignorance, and in one glance, and in one moment of time, summons before him what he had hitherto gradually and painfully explored in detail. He feels as if he had risen in his rank of being.

But in the corresponding case of spiritual knowledge, we do not only survey a delicious land of promise from a spiritual Pisgah,—we do not only from a lofty mountain, in company with our Lord, see all the kingdoms of the spiritual world, and the glory of them, but we have mounted far above the region of doubt and perplexity; we stand upon a rock, and that rock is Christ,—a position immoveable, eternal.

Let us not, therefore, O brethren and partners in the Revelation of Christ Jesus, neglect so great salvation. In refusing it, think ye that we shall have refused once only, which is a sin sufficiently great, or twice only, which is a sin more fearful still? O no! we shall have refused thrice, and what shall save us then, what further means shall renew us to repentance then? For thrice hath God, by his merciful intervention with fallen man, delivered his Revelation upon earth. Once in Paradise, again from

Mount Sinai, and lastly from Mount Calvary. Happy the forgetful Heathen, happy the rejecting Jew, compared with the heedless Christian. With fear and trembling, then, at our responsibility; with joy and gratitude for the gift; with faith and hope in his promises, let us accept in heart and mind his blessed word; reckoning the knowledge of this the only wisdom,—the practice of its doctrines the only virtue,—the delight of acquiring the graces thence derived the only joy,—the calm and serenity which it inspires the only peace,—the affections which it moulds and creates the only love,—the reward which it offers the only prize,—the way which it points out the only road to everlasting life. So help us, Almighty God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

# SERMON II.

## ON THE ORIGIN AND CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

HEB. XII. 22—24.

*But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

THE term "Church," or "Assembly of the Lord," is taken in several meanings, more or less restricted; they are, however, all reducible under one general definition, which is, "an assembly of creatures united in the worship of God, according to his expressed will:" hence from the first moment of the creation of a class of rational beings, to whom God had signified his will, the Church of God commenced; and at the instant before the fall of man, it comprehended the innumerable company of angels in heaven, and

our first parents upon earth. All were then true and lively members, all possessed with the same spirit: the will of God, being the will of all his creatures, bound them into one perfect society: flesh was in unity with the spirit, the outward and the inward man were the same, and old and new were terms inapplicable alike to body and to mind. But from that sad hour a woful change began, which broke into fragments all this lovely harmony: the will of man was no longer the will of God; accordingly, he was separated from this spiritual society, cut off from the communion of angels. God, however, by his special intervention, again revealing his will to man, under his altered circumstances, the Church was re-established upon earth. But now, since the will and the profession were but too often distinct, it had also its distinction of visible and invisible; the latter alone being that which maintained any real connexion with the spiritual society of heaven, and being united with it, in proportion as the will of the regenerated man approached to the will of the original innocent man: thus the Church of God, under the peculiar title of militant upon earth, commenced a new career. Alas, the sad distinction implied in this title! She was now set apart from the Church in heaven, and alas, its too pregnant meaning! for she was now to be

militant in a long and almost desperate warfare against sin and death, and the banded powers of hell, made insolent and resolute by their newly achieved victory. From the moment of her dethronement from heaven, she has been clad as a penitent in sackcloth; for her crown of glory, she has had the sprinkling of dust and ashes on her shorn head; for robes of peace and righteousness, she has been laden with the armour of battle; for the joyous song of uninterrupted thanksgiving, of the acknowledgment of unbounded bliss from a holy incorrupt heart, she has had a new song put into her mouth, the mournful elegy of confession of sinful unworthiness, of acknowledgment of the justice of God's chastisement, of deprecation of his wrath and vengeance: instead of innocence she has repentance, instead of enjoyment she is presented with hope. Reduced to this sad change of condition, she is now sojourning with all her sons, as in a pilgrimage, in these realms below, wearied and to be wearied continually, almost unto fainting; yea, sometimes brought even unto death's door, awaiting in all patience and hope, that hour when the forfeit of death shall have been paid by all her children at the resurrection of the dead, and the Holy Spirit of God shall once again enter upon undivided, undisputed possession of our minds and bodies, breathing into them perfect innocence and everlasting life;

and men and angels, once again joined in close communion, shall glorify their Creator, singing the song of redemption in the blood of the Lamb, evermore, world without end.

In proceeding to consider the Church under this restricted sense, we must revert to the circumstances of the fall. The sum of the sad change wrought in man's moral nature was, that his will was no longer the will of God. He now knew evil, and did evil; discontent with his present condition, uncontroulable appetites, overweening pride and ambition, utter perplexity upon the attributes of God, thenceforward took possession of him. His eyes indeed were opened; he knew more than he did before; but not, alas, of heavenly things, but of the powers of hell, the existence of which God had hitherto kept secret from him: once he knew but of angels, but now of devils also: from the spiritual he at once became a natural man. He was now without God in the world, and, notwithstanding his stiff-necked pride, yet his consciousness of the degradation of sin, his sense of irretrievable loss, his assurance of everlasting death, (into all which we cannot with any sympathy enter, never having tasted the contrast of innocence and immortality,) these would overwhelm his mind with all the agony of fruitless remorse, with all the hard-hearted recklessness of despair. He

was an utter cast-away from God. Such was his state when he was met by God, with the promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Intending to explain this promise in the next discourse, I shall here take for granted, that it implies an eventual restoration to his former bliss and purity by means of a Saviour, who was to rise from among his own seed. Under this view of it, coupled with the circumstances under which it was given, we shall discover the revelation of all those points which we saw, in the last discourse, were necessary to be revealed to the natural man, before he could have any apprehension of heavenly things.

First of all: he of course retained from his previous state, all his knowledge of God as the Creator and sustainer of the universe.

Secondly: his sentence of death and assurance of restoration unveiled the attributes of God, as moral governor of the universe, affording him the most signal instance of all which the world has ever seen, (except in our blessed Lord,) both of his justice and of his mercy.

Thirdly: the promise of restoration to a being just fallen from a state of immortality, could be nothing else than an assurance of a life to come everlasting, and in the same body, in which he had enjoyed his previous immortality.

Fourthly: the forgiveness of sins is evidently conveyed here.

Fifthly: the assistance of God's grace is clearly implied on comparing the circumstances of the whole transaction.

These communications on the part of God will demand, and call forth, corresponding qualities on the part of man; which will be, repentance, on receiving the inestimable and unexpected forgiveness of God, with resolution of amendment. As remorse is the offspring of despair, so is this quality of Hope and Faith, by which alone he could lay hold of that hope, and heartily accept the promise, and maintain his assurance of its performance.

And since it is by these two qualities that he lays hold of the promise of the bliss to come, he will consider the exhibition of them and their fruits, that is, holiness of life, requisite to its final attainment. But man's relation has been entirely changed by this offer of God, so that if everlasting death was his lot before, it will not be so now: and therefore, inasmuch as his acceptance meets with everlasting happiness, so will his rejection with its co-ordinate, everlasting misery. Thus is deduced a state of future retribution.

Thus the Church of God, commencing at the fall, contains all the fundamental articles, the maintain-

ing of which, distinguishing the spiritual from the natural man, has been required by it, and will be required by it throughout all ages. But this Church was to consist, not of two cotemporary individuals, but of successive companies of men; hence ordinances will be required to regulate the pure transmission of its creed. By means of these, man will renew his memory, and God will repeat his assurances. They are—

First: Prophecy, originating in this promise, and carrying it on through successive ages.

Secondly: Sacrifice, which is indeed prophecy in a bodily shape, being a vivid representation of what was to come. We encounter this rite as soon as we are introduced to the sons of Adam.

Thirdly: the observation of the Sabbath, being the only remnant of the Church of Paradise. This would be a stated season for sacrifice, and thus transmit the original revelation.

Such then are the articles, and such the ordinances common and necessary to the universal Church of all ages, down from Adam until now. But as all flow from the promise of God made to him, and as this promise is renewed from time to time by means of prophecy, expanding ever as the period of fulfilment draws nigh, it is evident that both the creed and the ordinances of the Church

will also extend. In this view the duration of the Church is first of all divisible into two great periods, the one comprising the winding up of the fundamental prophecy, the other containing the unravelling of the same: these are termed by the Jewish prophets the former and latter days,—as preceding or succeeding the main point of accomplishment,—and are as distinct as the dark and enlightened hemispheres of our globe. But the former period admits of a sub-division, made by the solemn renewal of the original promise, by the special interference of God in covenant with Abraham and his children, which was finally sealed on Mount Sinai. Hence there are altogether three periods, essentially distinct from each other, in which the Church is respectively denominated the Patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Christian. As the fall of man begins the first, and his restoration opens the third, the second commences with an intermediate state of constraint and tutelage, as of one who had abused the range and liberty which had been allowed him, and required strong discipline before he was again set free to enjoy the full liberty of the Gospel. In the first, man is admitted to the light of spiritual things, but they are faint and distant. In the second, he contemplates them through the medium of gross and sensible representations; in the third, this inter-

vening veil is removed, and he sees them no longer distant, but face to face: to trace the successive development of the creed and constitution of the Church through the several stages, is the object of this investigation. But the present discourse will be confined to considering the Church as a society. The Church of God being an assembly of men united in the worship of God according to his revealed will, unity is the essential property of this Church; and it is evident that this unity must be both spiritual and bodily. We will first examine the spiritual.

The spiritual unity is twofold: a number of beings are considered as one, both in respect to community of nature, and to the common instrument producing such community; in other words, it is both essential and instrumental.

Now all mankind are essentially one by community of nature, derived from their general head and representative,—the first man, Adam. But what a representative have we here? how can we, united under such a head, stand up before God for a moment, except for condemnation and death? For this Adam, in whom all mankind find unity, both clean and unclean, believer and unbeliever, must be the fallen ungenerated Adam, the Adam of sin and death; from whom deriving our unholiness, we are

all corrupt, all degraded, all condemned, all denied access to God, cast away from the light of his presence, cut off from the comfort of his communion. If, therefore, we have recourse to our common father, it must be the spiritual Adam, the son of pardon and promise, gathered under whom we may approach God as justified and blessed. But neither is this sufficient. Believers are not thus summed up under one head. The Jew, who has inherited from Abraham a covenant so much more bounteous, will scarcely forego so great advantages to range himself by the side of those who are gathered under the more scanty privileges of Adam. The Christian, who has derived from his Saviour spiritual riches which had been hidden from mankind from the foundation of the world, will scarcely divest himself of these to place himself under Abraham as head, and still less under Adam. In this view, therefore, mankind, with respect to their means of appearing before God as one body, that is, as members of his Church, would be separated under three heads. We must go deeper then for our principle of unity. Now, although the person in whom each covenant is made be different in the above cases, the person who is the object of the promise of each covenant is all along the same; in him both Adam and Abraham, with all their children, have

one and the same interest; in him, their Redeemer, all stand redeemed, and therefore holy and acceptable before God. Under the shelter of His wing of healing, who will gather us even as a hen gathereth her young chickens, we are all glad to crowd. Our essential unity then consists in all being one, under and in Christ Jesus, who is the second Adam, in whom we are, by regeneration, all one in our spiritual essence unto everlasting life and bliss; even as, by generation, we are all one in our natural essence in the first Adam, unto condemnation and death.

But how are all believers from the foundation of the world, thus one in Christ Jesus? This will immediately appear from the consideration of the instrumental unity.

Our minds must for this purpose have in common some grand moving principle, which shall direct them all to one end, and fix them all upon one object. It is obvious, that none of the principles of this world will answer the purpose, for (were there no other objection) they all stop short at different stages in different minds. But neither will all the principles of the next world, love of God for instance. But it must be that principle to which all the rest are subordinate, which awakes them all, and gives all their final object. And this is faith in the

Redeemer, who is the object of all promise; by this our spirits are all brought into unison: through this we all love, bless, and adore God, with the same love for the same blessing: by this we all join in laying hold of his gracious promises: by this we all become of one mind, and are also of one mind with Christ Jesus, and we are thus joined to our spiritual head as a well compacted body. By faith in Christ Jesus, says the Apostle, (GAL. iii. 26,) we are all the children of God; all natural distinctions are done away; master and slave, Jew and Heathen, male and female, are all one in him. By this are united men of the most distant ages and countries; Adam with his latest descendant; the Patriarch who saw Christ in spirit, with the Apostle who saw him in the flesh; the Jew who looked forward to his coming, with the Christian who looks backward upon it; all are brethren of one another, and of him who is not ashamed to call us brethren. And however the view which Faith upholds to the eyes of distant generations may vary in growing clearness and extent, still it is essentially the same, directed on to the same object, awakening the same hopes, and infusing the same holy principles.

But on account of the variety just mentioned, which will affect its mode of expression, and its intermediate objects, we must be careful to distin-

guish between the fundamental articles of faith which unite men of all periods, and those which unite men of any particular period only. The narrow extent of belief required in one stage of the Church, would be infidelity in a later stage, to which revelation had come down cleared and amplified. Thus, while the faith is essentially the same, the notions of the character of the Redeemer, and the objects conveyed to the mind by the vehicles of prophecy and sacrifice, will differ both in clearness and number. The Redeemer may be expected to arise at some undetermined period from amidst the great body of mankind, and with faint notions of his attributes, as by the Patriarch: or may be looked for from the line of David, within a specified period, and with no obscure prospect of the manner in which he was to fulfil his high office, as by the spiritual Jew: or may be beheld as already come, with a clear and complete knowledge of his character and office, as by the Christian. Again; prophecy may limit the view to one grand spiritual object in prospect, as it did to the Patriarch: or take in a vast field of preparatory and collateral events, as in the case of the Jew: or have been accomplished in the grand end expected by them, and run on still further into the regions of time, with a long train of events, directed on to the consum-

mation of all things, as it does to the Christian. Sacrifice may be offered by each person, at any place, as by the Patriarch: or may be limited to persons, place, and time, as with the Jew: and, as in both cases, may dimly pre-figure, though in the latter case by numerous and pointed types, what was to come: or, its types having been realised, it may give way to a rite commemorative of its realisation, as with the Christian. The one great day in seven may be consecrated to the memory of the creation, as by the Patriarch: or may in addition commemorate a signal temporal deliverance, and rest from labour, as with the Jew: or may be set apart (changed to another day) for the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord, whereby was wrought a spiritual creation, a spiritual deliverance, a spiritual rest from labour, as with the Christian. In all these cases the main object of faith is the same. Yet did the Christian embrace no more objects in his belief than the Jew, nor the Jew than the Patriarch, they would each be guilty of apostacy. But the faith which unites men of one particular period must evidently be the same; must have the same clearness, the same number of objects, in short the same articles, the quantity of revelation being precisely the same; hence, while unity of faith cements the Church of all ages, unity of doctrine cements the

Churches of the same age. And this unity is wrought by the word of God, which, being originally given by the Holy Spirit, is also maintained in all purity by the same, in the heart of the earnest hearer, whom the same Spirit hath brought to entertain it. Thus this blessed agent effects in the moral world an operation similar to that which he performed in the natural, brooding on the surface of the abyss of wild and stormy human passions, over the darkness of wayward imaginations, compelling by his energy into order and form the chaotic elements. He thus helpeth our infirmities, and, supplying quickness where the faculties are dull, candour where the mind is perverse, patience where it is hasty, humility where it is vain, docility where it is headstrong, purity where it is foul; removing thus the grand wall of partition between man and the truth, filling his heart with the spirit of Christ, he brings all men to be of one mind in Jesus Christ, so that all may be built up together into an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Being therefore one in Christ, and obtaining that union through faith in Christ, the true members of his Church form the company of the saints in light, are all redeemed, all sanctified, all glorified. In him they have a representative who can not only stand before the Father who dwelleth in unap-

proachable light, but is also one with him; thus have they sure access to God; and to him as its head, its king, its bridegroom, its shepherd, the Church as his body, his kingdom, his spouse, his flock, points all her operations. In him, pre-ordained for the salvation of man before the foundations of the world, all that has been established in her since the world began, and will be established to the end of time, finds unity of purpose. Her prayers, her prophecies, her sacrifices, her oblations and thanksgivings, are all pointed towards him: her consolations and her censures are in his name; her tribulations are endured for his sake; her joys and triumphs are in his victory; and, finally, his are all her members, in heart and mind, word and deed, in the life present and in the life to come. Such is the spiritual unity of the Church of God; to this, as an accident to substance, as body to soul, appertains the bodily unity, which we have now to consider.

As the visible Church is a society of men, to whose eyes spirit is indiscernible except by effects understood in the body, they obviously require for spiritual unity an assurance from signs in the body, and those signs will be either conventional or necessary; the former are passive forms to which we are obliged to have recourse in order to regulate place and time and mode of worship, and afford a mutual

expression of our minds; the latter are active qualities, exhibited in our moral conduct, being the fruits of the spirit, and therefore testifying to our neighbour every hour, by word or deed, to our being of the fellowship of the company of saints. There can be no comparison between the respective value of these two classes of signs. Is it not then most humiliating to us, that all the anxieties of the great body of the members of the visible Church, should have been directed to the former, which are in themselves quite indifferent, which give no proof of the sincerity of the inward man; and that they should have overlooked the latter, which are of vital interest, and cannot (at least for any length of time) be counterfeited?

With regard to the first, since our consent in their use is intended to designate the consent of our minds before God, and satisfy one another that we present ourselves before him, bound together in the bonds of faith, hope, and charity, it is evident that their foundation must lie in mutual charity; yet this, alas! is the very quality which of all others has been most neglected in the case of these outward forms, both by the imposer of them, and by the imposed. It is indeed a case of exceeding delicacy to draw every possible cord of love and unity, so as to bring our spirits into the most complete concord,

and at the same time to beware lest, by drawing too many and too tightly, the outward signs may express much more than the inward substance can correspond to. With regard to the former of these cases, I will venture to suggest a distinction which seems to have been but little attended to. A reformed Church stands in very peculiar circumstances: the very increase of the primitive Church, both as it spread among nations, and shot upward into the higher ranks of society, would call for some addition of forms and ordinances; and these have been conveyed into every quarter of the world, and there continue, notwithstanding that the purity of doctrine which accompanied them has long been most wofully defiled. Any one of these corrupt Churches then which sought to return to her ancient purity of faith, and, in consonance with that also, to remodel her system of rites and discipline, will not narrow her views to the nation wherein is her dwelling-place; but equally long-sighted and long-suffering, combining the wisdom of the serpent with the gentleness of the dove, she will look also to her sister Churches still benighted, and retain, were it but for charity's sake, those rites and ordinances which they received together with purity of faith. She thus avoids giving a needless shock to the learned and candid members of those Churches, (and indeed, also of her own,) and

keeps open a door to perfect union, as soon as ever they shall divest themselves of hurtful or needless superfluities. And if such Church be that of a nation, to which God hath committed exceeding power and influence among mankind, still more is she bound in charity to pursue this conduct, in proportion to the conspicuous station she must necessarily hold. All this should be diligently kept in view by her own members, who should bear in mind that things which seem, at best, indifferent, when she is considered individually, are any thing but indifferent when she is regarded as a part of the great whole of the visible Church of Christ. With this comprehensive charity, with this patient looking forward to a most desirable end, acted the reformers of our Church; nor have the fortunes of our nation been such as to justify us in contracting either one or the other. But, on the other hand, in the latter of these cases, these signs will have an undue estimation, will encumber and hide spirit with body, essence with matter; an humble means will be mistaken for a glorious end; agreement in lifeless forms will be substituted for agreement in purity of life, resulting from agreement in faith; and thus the imposer will put together in his visible communion, nothing better than a deformed lifeless corpse, presenting the stillness of death, not the calmness of

life; the union of mere adjacent masses of flesh, not the body instinct in every part with spirit; and, instead of bringing the bonds of the Church, which are faith, hope and charity, upon the world, will bring the bonds of the world, which are lust and power, upon the Church. Let us, however, in guarding against a system which presses all points, beware also of that which presses none; while we shrink from a superstitious reverence for bodily form, avoid also an affectation of spirituality beyond the limits of our bodily nature; while we shake off the yoke thrown on our necks by lust of power, spurn also that easy Epicurean accommodation which results from indifference to good, and connivance at evil; for if the one be destructive of charity by the compulsion to which it resorts, so is the other equally, by denying its only source, a pure and humble faith.

With regard to the second class, they make a separation between those whom the former would keep united. These are they which distinguish the member of the invisible Church, while the former mark but the member of the visible. These proceed from the spirit, and so appear in the flesh, and are therefore continual and abiding in it, like the signs of the inward soul, which never quit the living body; while the others are mere outward affections, which may occasionally be absent, and may be present even

in a dead body. These have ever set apart the member of the society of God's Church from the member of the society of this world; by these was Abel set apart from Cain, Shem from Ham, the true Israelite from the false Israelite, the true Christian from the false Christian; these signify to believers that their spirits are in unity by possession of the same Holy Spirit, poured into their hearts; these give us confidence in each other, connect our mutual actions, supply the means of our mutual intercourse. As the virtues in the society of the world, such are these graces in that of the Church. Now such signs must manifestly become more numerous as Revelation expands; for it must thus gradually supply more and more principles on which we must act; it must thus take in continually a greater number of the incidents of daily life; until, in its full expansion under Christ, it hath swept into its net the whole of our conversation on earth, taken us captive in soul and body, and brought into subjection the entire man, in all his thoughts and movements. In this our last stage of the Church, so hath the gap widened between it and the world, that their societes are removed as far asunder as the rich man and Lazarus: yea, farther; they are as distinct as their respective heads, as the fallen natural man and he who hath blended God and man in one person. Our light is now no longer

faintly reflected from types, no longer dimly struggles through the veil of prophecy, falling but obscurely here and there upon our practice. It is poured out upon it in a full bright stream from the fountain of light itself, so that not a point is left unilluminated. Hence every act of ours will manifest this heavenly source, and become a sign. And these signs we must be continually exhibiting, as children of light, to each other, assuring each other of our fellow-feeling, and thus bringing our spirits into union, as members under their great head. What shall we think now of those who assert that a man's religion is a mere affair between himself and his Maker? Is not this a most deplorable error, is it less than a virtual denial of Christ? A man cannot live and give no sign of life. But we, whenever we meet with a brother, must be ready with our sign; and where two or three are met together, not for prayer alone, they must so conduct themselves as if their common head were among them. They will refrain from evil words, and address themselves to good in conversation; they will maintain good faith in mutual dealing, and shew themselves possessed by the same spirit, and to be one in the same head and lord, Jesus Christ. Our Saviour has expressed by many lively parables, his intimate union with the society over which he presides. He has termed himself the bridegroom. This

body then, to which he has been married, must be one with him; every member also of it one with him; must have one course of action, one mind, one interest, one end; must love and hate, cherish and reject, hope and fear, the same thing. He has called himself the vine, of which himself is the main trunk, his followers the branches. Means he not here that they are all parts and portions of himself; that from him they derive, as branches from the trunk, their sap, draw all their stream of spiritual nourishment, their very inmost and vital principle of thought, word, and deed, and to him, in the duly appointed season, by various channels of works of love to fellow branches, return it; that from him is all their bloom and beauty of holiness, their leaves, their flower, and their fruit? And does he not lead us to conclude from these two similitudes, that whoever is not intimately united with him, is divorced, according to the one, as being unfaithful, cut off, according to the other, as being unsound? Moreover, he is the shepherd, of whom, if one of the flock lose sight, he is lost in the wilderness: he is the way, from which whoever turns aside loses the only road to everlasting life: he is the door, through which alone is the entrance into the city of eternal joy. If thus intimate be our union with Christ; if thus our spirit, in all its thoughts and designs, must conspire with his spirit; if thus every

act of our life must be referable to our union with him, and in him with one another, how can we possibly (unless we be indeed none of his) cease from exhibiting to our neighbours, from root through stem to topmost branch, the proofs of the indwelling sap of life, the signs and marks of our profession? Such is the Church of God, gathered from all ages and nations under one head, informed by one spirit, united in faith and works, in substance and sign, holy, entire, without rent, or spot, or wrinkle.

But now perhaps it may be asked of me, where is this Church of Christ? of the first class of signs of its existence we see indeed enough, and too often much more than enough. But these, it is confessed, may exist in the body after the spirit hath fled. But where is the other class of signs, which alone can assure us of its having life among us? On the moment of raising our heads from the perusal of this description, and looking at the broad Christian world before us, we see nothing corresponding. On the contrary, we behold its surface like the plan of a city which has been razed by war, or overthrown by a hurricane, broken up into shapeless detached heaps; we see its fair region here darkened with debasing superstition, there involved in the still deeper gloom of demoralising infidelity. We see no trace of unity under a common head, but coun-

sels equally devoid of holiness and of unity of purpose, cold-blooded interest and hot-blooded passion, maintaining their jar of unceasing discord. So that we are at a loss how to refute from facts the assertion of the freethinker, who maintains that religion has nothing to do between man and man, and considers it as nothing more than a business between him and his Maker; that is, an abstracted contemplation. Again, if we turn our eyes back upon the records of the past, we are still surveying the same sad picture, hearing the same doleful tragedy, which palls by a repetition of the same heart-rending scenes, of the same mournful accents, of the same wretched catastrophe. We must repeat therefore our question, "Where is this Church of Christ?"

Brethren, the question is indeed humiliating; it may well indeed put us to shame, but it need not put us to silence. It may well put us to shame, for what can be a greater reproach upon us than that our abuse of God's most precious gift should bring doubts upon the reality of the gift itself. But it will not put us to silence, for it is founded upon a superficial view and shallow reflection. We will even help the objector with his charges. We will remind him that at the time of the flood this Church had dwindled down to a single family; that again it increased, but again to dwindle, like a

precious plant in a foreign unkindly soil: that, even when the children of Abraham darkened with their numbers the plenteous land of God's accomplished promise, there were left but seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal: that the general aspect of Christendom at this day is mournful and perplexing. What then? God is just, and man is unjust; God hath offered, but man hath rejected; God hath given, but man hath abused; so that were not a vestige of the Church to be traced, God is justified. But neither has man (by God's grace) been so entirely wanting. There are signs, many and manifest, of Christ's true Church dwelling among us, which occur to all who will not close their eyes, if these objectors will but look for the Church militant, and not for the Church triumphant. The former, even in the most painfully selected body of its holiest members, must ever disclose much human infirmity,—how were it otherwise militant? Fallen man, however regenerated, can never exemplify, in this life, a perfect model of a son of God; he is ever attaining, but never having attained; how then shall a body be perfect, each of whose members is imperfect? The signs, therefore, exhibited by a perseverance in the struggle to attain, are they which mark the true member of the Church of Christ, and assure its existence among us. And if such seem

so very rare, it is partly owing to the sort of company by which the objector is likely to be surrounded, and partly also to the very unobtrusiveness of good men. The straws and the feathers keep the surface of the water, the pearls and gems are in the depths below; the vices and crimes of the children of this world attract the eyes and fill the mouth of the world; holiness is theirs who are not of this world, and are, therefore, overlooked by it, and unrecorded. But supposing the number of those who exhibit the required signs to be less than it really is, what scandal and stone of offence would this be to him who has been told from the mouth of the great Head himself, that his real Church upon earth shall ever be a remnant until the fulness of the time come; that many are called, but few are chosen;—who feels assured that, wherever two or three are met to join their spirits in his name, there his true Church is brightly visible, there the glory of the Lord, as in his temple, is shining, and never shall be done away.

But however full of offence the appearance presented by God's Church upon earth may be to the fool, it is overflowing with instruction to the wise. It humbles him indeed, but it is in order to exalt him; it warns him, but in the same moment it cheers him. For he there sees the body of his own

infirmities most painfully reflected and multiplied, as through glass, into innumerable images. He is led from this view to examine with a more severe probe, and with a more intimate knowledge of human failings, his own bosom; he detects there weaknesses and elements of weaknesses of which he was formerly unsuspicious. He traces a connexion between his own failings and the disgrace of that society which ought to be holy, even as its head is holy. Therefore he will more than ever deplore his own sinfulness, which has contributed its share to the general shame; he will mourn that the spirit of men should thus be ever at war with the spirit of God, and will humble himself even to the dust. But, at the same time, in a consciousness of spiritual improvement, through God's grace, he will see its honour and glory; there is holiness in it; and every step which he makes in advance supplies him with a joyful earnest of those blessed days, when, like a faithful spouse of Christ, the Church shall put on her crown of pure gold, and stand in her white raiment all glorious, without spot or wrinkle. At every point of progress he has a joyful earnest, assuring him that God's promises are accomplishing, though not yet accomplished; that the serpent's head hath been bruised individually and potentially, though not generally and actually: that the desire

of nations hath been offered to all, although not received by all: the conquerer of sin and death hath been set upon his throne, although all his enemies be not as yet put underneath his footstool. Thus with his growth in spirit grows also in his mind the beauty of the holiness of the Church of God, and however at variance be its model as presented to his eye of spirit, with the form which meets his eye of flesh; however squalid may appear the one after the glorious brightness of the other, he is neither offended, nor does he despair. He has a witness within him which bids him look onward in patience and unshaken faith to the end; he feels in his bosom the elements of the bliss which shall accompany the final union of the two, and they shall once again be blended, never by a second fall to be rent asunder. For then shall the reign of Satan have been accomplished, then shall his deceits and wiles have been overcome, then shall the partition-wall of sin and delusion be broken down, and all hearts shall be open, all desires known. Then all the children of God being of one mind, possessed with one and the same spirit, united in every thought and turn of thought, filled with the love of the Father, abounding in the grace of the Son, and enjoying the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, shall form the congregation of the first-born, of the

spirits of just men made perfect, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the company of innumerable angels.

Brethren, we may say with the beloved Apostle, "it is the last time;" perils and trials are at hand, and the arm of the heaven-commissioned thresher seems already uplifted, in order to descend with a blow which shall separate the chaff and the wheat. But let no gloominess of times, no overflowings of ungodliness dismay us; rather more abundant be our hope, more unshaken our faith, for the time of our redemption draweth nigh. God's chastisement must try his children, and usher in the joyfulness of the inheritance which shall be theirs who abide the trial; therefore let us cast aside all misgiving, attach ourselves to all well-doing, and, above all, exercise that charity, which, in trying times, is so grievously wounded. For in proportion as, under the influence of God's holy Spirit, we can agree with our neighbour in thought, word, and deed, in the same do we realize upon earth the Church of God; in the same do we approach to the blissfulness of his Church in heaven; in the same do we grow up to the standard of fellow-citizens of the saints, of members of the household of God. All this worketh that faith which we found on the merits of our

Redeemer; that hope of everlasting life which we cherish in him who rose from the dead, and that charity with which we love one another, because he first loved us. Such faith, such hope, such charity, may he give unto us, and maintain in us by his Spirit, that we may be all one in Christ, who is one with the Father.

# SERMON III.

## ON PROPHECY.

PSALM CXXX. 5.

*I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.*

THE word of God is not like the word of man, and for estimating the former we shall obtain but little aid from any consideration of the latter. They both communicate certain ideas to men, and there ends their similitude; in all other respects our estimate would be more safely formed according to the rule of contraries. For as this latter goes forth too often without sense or design, or at best, and however premeditated, to a temporary purpose, that proceeds from God's eternal immutable counsel, and passes on to eternity. This is essentially extinct from the moment in which it has been uttered, and when we say it lives, (as in the memory of man,) we are fully aware that we are using a figure which is literally inapplicable. All it can do is, like some worthless insects, to give birth to a fact, and then

die as it were in the labour. But the Word of God liveth for ever: it waits for no agent, and the fact to which it gives birth depends upon it, and upon it alone, for the continuance of the principle of life: by it were the worlds created, and by it they are sustained; by it empires rise and fall in their appointed seasons; in it all which goes before is comprehended, and held in union with all which goes after, and eternity is connected with eternity. The word of man taken into the heart will too often defile and overcloud the soul; the word of God received there is the only principle of holiness, and is a lantern to the feet. The word of man is often bitter; the word of God is sweet to the taste, yea, sweeter than honey to the mouth. The word of man is too often weak, powerless, blunt, and unpointed, unable to penetrate beyond the ear, and reach the mind. But the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The word of man is too often, as proceeding from an unholy bosom, faithless; and as coming from one who has no power over fortune, never sure. But the word of God is true, and sure altogether. Therefore it is, as the Psalmist says, the cause

of certain hope to every mind in which it is received.

The Word of God, thus eternal, steadfast, holy, powerful, issued forth ever to the same merciful end of man's redemption, may be considered as having a two-fold operation on his mind. It will either hold forward continually to view the glorious end of that redemption, referring him by the way, as time proceeds, to certain intermediate events to come at certain destined periods as its harbingers, and thus maintaining in him a sure and certain hope in the end, and by what has been fulfilled, giving a pledge of that which remains to be fulfilled: or it will give him instructions how to conduct himself, so that he might be a partaker in the blessedness of that end, exalting his thoughts, chastening his affections, and directing his understanding; thus it will be either prophetical or doctrinal. It is intended to discuss it now under the first of these two heads.

The Word of God, as far as the Church which we are considering is immediately concerned, first came to Adam upon his fall; and it could come to him but for two ends, namely, either to finally pronounce upon him the sentence of death, with which he had been previously threatened, or to modify that sentence according to God's good pleasure. The first is plainly implied in the words "dust thou art, and unto dust

thou shalt return." But the death expected by Adam must have been eternal death, and this admits of a modification by being changed into temporary; this latter being actually the case, the only passage in which we have to seek it is in that promise, "that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head;" which, though addressed to the serpent, yet, as being solemnly recorded in God's written word, we cannot but regard as a promise made to all mankind in the presence of Adam. Considering the solemn occasion on which it was made, when the head of all mankind, the chief and representative of millions of living souls, was standing arraigned for judgment upon himself and his posterity, when he was tortured with agonies of guilt and despair, which were not only new to him, not only in deepest contrast to his former innocence and bliss, but also must have for these reasons far exceeded any pangs undergone by the most wretched of his posterity,—surely it is impossible to understand its expressions literally, surely thus they would be unworthy of the occasion, and appear to Adam a cruel banter, a mockery of his depth of woe. We are driven therefore to a spiritual sense, and in this we shall find the modification sought.

Before the foundation of the world Jesus Christ was fore-ordained for the salvation of man. Every

thing, therefore, communicated by God to man, must terminate in him. Can we imagine then that the very first intervention of God with man, after he fell into the need of salvation, and at a moment when beyond any other he must have felt that need, at a moment when beyond any other he must have given himself up to utter recklessness of despair, that this should have passed off without a hint of so great consolation, and that he, the head of mankind, should be deprived of that comfort which has been so freely imparted to his posterity? Without some communication of this kind how could religion either have begun or maintained itself upon earth; what reason would God have had to complain of the wickedness of man at the time of the flood, and how could such characters as Abel, Enoch, and Noah have ever existed? Surely God's signal vengeance on that occasion argues the abuse of something imparted since the fall; and the existence of such characters argues the use of something communicated since that hour of hopelessness. Why, too, should God have maintained Adam a single moment upon earth after the pronouncing of his sentence, if there were nothing further? He could have had no delight in the ineffable misery of his creature prolonged for such a period! We cannot, therefore, suppose Adam to have been left without that con-

solation, which we ourselves, who have never experienced the horrid consciousness of the contrast of our state with perfect innocence and bliss, yet find absolutely necessary to our patient endurance of existence. Neither can we suppose so important a communication on so important an occasion, to have been omitted by Holy Writ. If the sentence has been recorded by which we were all, in our general head and representative, condemned to death, surely it would not neglect to notice the promise by which, in the same general head and representative, we were all restored to life. But if it be not implied in this passage, it is nowhere. It must be, therefore, implied in this passage.

The sense, therefore, in which Adam understood it, would be this,—that one should hereafter arise from his seed, who should triumph over the power of Satan, to which he himself had yielded: that he was himself, with all his posterity, to share the fruits of this victory (otherwise what consolation had it been?)—and as his own defeat wrought his fall, so the triumph of that promised one would correspondingly work his restoration?

That such a sense but obscurely glimmers through the express words to our mental sight, needs form no great difficulty, if we will only consider the peculiar circumstances of Adam. The great obscurity to us

lies in the personification of the evil spirit by the serpent. Here it is easy to conceive that he would have no difficulty, so differently circumstanced was he who had gone through the whole transaction as a chief actor in it, from us to whom so brief an account has come after many ages. But besides that he was furnished with all the illustrating facts,—I should rather say was most deeply impressed with them in heart and understanding, so that he could not but readily apply the words of the prophecy,—his attention had never been distracted and its powers weakened, as ours have been, by such variety of incidents. This was the first event, as it were, in his life; he could have had no previous change or degree of bliss or woe to call his attention; all its powers, therefore, were concentrated upon this fact, to a degree much exceeding what we can bestow upon one of the most vital interest. Nothing can befall us so important as to affect us to a degree approaching to what he felt; and even our greatest calamities find us already tolerably broken in, and prepared to support them. Besides, his clearness of understanding (wreck as it was of perfection) must unquestionably have been superior to that of ours, which have never known the uncloudedness of innocence, but are clogged with the grossness of long-transmitted guilt; and therefore, supposing even all

things else the same, what is obscure to us might have brought no perplexity to him. Again, while he was at that moment in circumstances which would give their peculiar point to the words uttered to him, his despair, felt for the first time, and intense far beyond any with which we can be affected, would be more alive to discern the first glimmering of hope. If we have seen it, in our experience, so quick in catching the first ray of comfort, and in gathering a warmth from a light so feeble as to be quite indiscernible to others less concerned, what may we imagine to have been his quickness of apprehension, his eagerness of grasp? Can we then, in fine, wonder that the most spiritual man, the wisest man, the most unhappy man, placed in circumstances into which, with the liveliest picturing of our imagination, we can scarcely gain an insight, surrounded by relations into which, with all our vigour of understanding, we can barely penetrate,—that he should have discerned a meaning where we are baulked with perplexity?

There intervenes no other prophecy between this and the promise made to Abraham "that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed." This therefore sufficed for the consolation of the Patriarchal church. Nor was it, if we consider the circumstances, insufficient to that end. For the life of

Adam himself was extended through nearly one-half of the duration of this church down to Abraham, and the life of Noah alone fills up to within 130 years the interval between his death and Abraham's birth. Thus the prophecy came down to the last faithful member of that church with little diminution either of its interest or clearness. But circumstances are very much changed when we come to the Jewish period; not only are we come to the short duration of man's life, which has remained ever since, and therefore made tradition a much more precarious channel of knowledge, but by this time the church is confined to a narrow portion of earth; therefore man would require assurance against the many untoward chances to which it was thus exposed. The promise of the Redeemer was limited not only to a nation, but progressively to a single family of that nation: hence the stability of the nation and of the family must be assured. On these accounts prophecy would both be more frequent and also more particular.

With regard to frequency, it is singular that down from Moses to Ezra there passes by not a single generation without the accomplishment of some prophecy delivered by Moses and his successors. So completely did God provide for keeping up a faith in his promises, and exhort them to look to the end in steadfast hope.

On the ground of particularity, we are here presented with a new feature; not only is the great end of all more plainly discovered, but a train of events leading on to it is foretold, and prophecy thus takes into account a large mass of things temporal; by this connexion the end becomes palpable, as it were: it is no longer the mere promise which it was before, for each of the above events forms a substantial earnest of its performance. The Jew can keep it steadily in sight, knowing its exact direction, and as he proceeds, being able to estimate its very distance, guided on as he is by a spangled line of stars of glorious lustre, and of unchangeable positions, the fates of kingdoms and empires of this world, of Nineveh, of Tyre, of Babylon, of Damascus, earthly as they are, become to him spiritual beacons, and fall, as it were, into that numerous class of bodily types by which the eyes of this babe were allured on to spiritual realities. This series of prophecies, varying of course in circumstances as the end drew nearer, may be divided into three stages.

The first, extending from Moses to David, has a peculiar character from prophecy, being mostly applied to facts isolated and at no great distance, as Nathan's with regard to Absalom's revolt; and it is remarkable that God's special intervention is very far more frequently and signally called forth in this

stage than in the following. All this we may expect from the circumstances of the period, in which the nation had not obtained a complete settlement in the land until the end. It required therefore, amidst its tumultuous and unsteady fortunes, continued and particular assurances of God's help and protection.

The next period reaches to the captivity; and in this prophecy takes both a longer and wider range, and for the most part goes on directly towards the end. In this we have the denunciations against Babylon and Tyre, and in this the kingdom of Messiah is painted in glowing colours, and brought so near to the eye that even the most dull and desponding must take heart at the sight: meanwhile God's special intervention is rare and at long intervals. All this is in accordance with the circumstances of the period: the nation had been completely established in the land, and therefore a vast accession of confidence had accrued to God's promises; he had given such an earnest that there could be no excuse for doubt; the nation too, as now settled, had leisure to look to the end; and to that end, as the monarchy declined and evil times came on, they would gaze more and more intently; and from the blessed end God's word was removing all the apparently insuperable obstacles intervening; the fall of

their enemies was pronounced, and if their captivity drew near, not to the eye of the prophet only, but of the common man, yet the song of man's deliverance pierced beyond the gloom, and assured the end in despite of the thick veil of sorrow which intervened.

The third period, if we except the deliverance of the prophet Daniel and his companions exhibited before a foreign people, is destitute of God's special intervention. But prophecy assumes a more decisive tone, and her song grows much more comprehensive; the nation was now either in captivity or in all the feebleness of its restoration; but at the same time the great end was coming fast into sight, the interval then was spread over by a golden network as it were of prophecy, visibly connecting the present and future. We now meet, for the first time, with a train of prophecy; that is, with a period of time foretold with all its divisions by critical events pointed out, and the whole and its parts adjusted to chronological dates; thus the very year of the Messiah's coming was pointed out, his character still more clearly marked, and the last strain of prophecy which resounded in the Jewish church rose with an impetuous bound, so as far to overleap its previous limits, and to alight amid the glories and the wonders of the Christian church.

The Christian period opens with the accomplishment of the original promise, which was the key-note to all others; a Redeemer has actually arisen from the seed of Adam, of Abraham, of Judah, of David. As far as they looked for, the end of the world is come. But to us the world begins anew, as with a second Adam; and through this second Adam we have a fresh promise given, that his Church shall remain upon earth until his second coming again to put the final consummation to all things. Here then, as in the two previous dispensations, we have an original promise to be carried on by prophecy, and the whole interval may be divided into two periods.

The first contains that short but momentous time when the church, as in the first period of the Jewish, was wandering, as it were, in the desert, and had obtained no settlement in the land; when it was yet but appearing in bright sprinkles here and there, like dew upon the thirsty sands of the Heathen world. The first promise had been made through the first Adam, in a season of extreme sorrow and humiliation; and, in a similar season was made the second promise, through the second Adam. This period, then, like the corresponding Jewish, is full of God's special intervention by

signs and wonders, full also of prophecy. But prophecy is not continued beyond it; the last strain comes from the last surviving Apostle; hence the prophecy of this period is not only particular and applying to events close at hand, as that of Agabus, but also runs on in a train so as to reach to the end of all, as in the prophecy of the 1260 years; so that this period answers to the two first of the Jewish. In the second period, God's special intervention has ceased, prophecy is silent. The church was now firmly settled, a store of prophecy had already been laid in, a vast store had also been accomplished by the time of the final destruction of Jerusalem: every thing, therefore, was assured. There was no need then of a line of prophets; this period therefore resembles the third Jewish, only the certainty which renders a line of prophets needless, rests on different grounds. The end is as far off as in the first Jewish period. But then he in whom all previous prophecy has found its fulfilment, and who therefore gives us the surest pledge possible, he has given us a prophecy both of himself immediately, and a long train of prophecy through his beloved apostle mediately. Nothing, therefore, in the church calls for further messages from God. But as long as she is supplied with a succession of

faithful men, fit conservators and interpreters of the deposit already made, (and such he assures us that there shall ever be,) so long has the church all the substantial benefits of a line of prophets.

Such is prophecy relative to mankind in the general. We now come to consider its effects upon man individually. These may be considered as three-fold. Man will be comforted, will be warned, and will be proved by prophecy.

The two first effects are co-ordinate, beginning together from the first, and ever after associated. Sentence of death was pronounced on our first parents, in that same intervention of God in which he promised their final restoration. And we have all inherited the one together with the other. Every individual since that moment, however spiritually regenerated, may be considered under a two-fold view. With regard to the remaining (and, in this our state, inevitable) infirmities of the flesh, he is the old man condemned to death, with all its necessary attendance of pain and trouble, bodily and mental. But with regard to the power of the spirit, he is the new man, restored to everlasting life. In this latter capacity, therefore, apprehending the sure word of God, he applies it to soothe all the fears and perplexities, or to pull down all the presumption, between which his frail mortal nature may be

fluctuating, according to the aspect of the world before him. God's threats fill him with humiliation and awe, and tell him that he is dust, and to dust shall return. They assure him that he shall be dealt with after his sins, and rewarded after his iniquities. They proclaim that the Lord is jealous, the Lord revengeth, and is furious. They bid him seek righteousness, seek meekness, so that it may be that he shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. But his comfort binds up his heart, bruised and broken by worldly afflictions, encourages him to exclaim, "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die:" and promises that his warfare shall be accomplished, and his iniquity pardoned. Accordingly, every dispensation, beginning with that given to Adam, has opened with a combination of denunciation and consolation. If in one hand it has held forth to man the cup of joy and salvation, in the other it has also presented the cup of fury and of trembling. In the very address of Moses, in which, not long before his death, he concluded the covenant between God and the children of Israel, what a fearful mixture of threats with promises! Their utter ruin is predicted, together with the coming of the expected Redeemer. The harbinger of the Gospel proclaimed repentance for the remission of sins, and told men, that while

God would gather the wheat into his garner, he would burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. And the blessed Preacher himself, our Lord and Redeemer, hath promised tribulation and sorrow, even to the inheritors of everlasting life; and while from his own mouth, and also from the lips of his beloved disciple, he hath assured the everlasting endurance of the church, and the victory of his saints, he is full of severe denunciations against particular churches and individuals, who shall be guilty of disobedience. And how full of warning have these come down to us! From their ashes, still smoking, those churches are crying out to us at this day, telling of wrath and judgment to come; and from their very graves individuals are raising a warning voice against opportunities slighted, gifts rejected, and talents misapplied. In every period, therefore, of the church, if adversity have its comfort, so has prosperity its warning.

In prosperous times, men are too apt to be engrossed with the enjoyments of this life, and their attention is too much drawn away from the bliss of the life to come. But even when they address themselves to such a consideration, it is in such unison with their cheerful feelings, that very general terms are sufficient to convey God's promise of the future happiness. The mind, surrounded with images of

bliss, needs not a list of particulars to strengthen its belief or hopes. All is warm and full of heat, and a few sparks are sufficient to kindle a blaze. Hence prophecy passes over such times, with but just so much addition of particulars as shall suffice to carry it on in due and gradual expansion. But in disastrous times, men's minds are unstrung, their hearts are cold, their understandings are darkened with doubt and perplexity, their affections are overcome with terror and apprehension. General terms of comfort will not now suffice; men cannot hold and cling to them: they now want particulars; they want detailed circumstances, which they may oppose to the detail of misery which surrounds them whithersoever they turn the eye of flesh. They want to contrast a deliverer with a subjugator; an everlasting kingdom with a falling empire; partners in light and bliss with companions in pain and woe; unlimited happiness with dreary prolongation of misery; a time appointed, and resting-place for the sole of their feet, with the wretched uncertainty by which they are distracted; characters of goodness and mercy with those of cruelty and vice, by which they are oppressed. They, in short, want a bright side to each of the appalling objects around; they wish each dark and threatening cloud to be at least edged with light, in order that they may be

convinced that the sun still exists, and that day shall return on the morrow, if not to-day; they wish to behold angels of light combating against each of those foul fiends which disturb their peace. Therefore it was that as the times grew darker to the Jewish Church, prophecy grew more particular, until in the end, amid all the fearful signs of approaching downfall, amid the abomination of desolation, amid the abandonment of God's visible presence among them, declared by the blazing temple, amid the humiliation and despair of the captivity of princes and people, amid the pitiable feebleness and helplessness of their restoration, amid all the horrid discordant sounds attending this sad procession of events, was heard an uninterrupted strain of the song of prophecy, which would not be put to silence, but waxing louder and louder like the trumpet of God, rose higher and higher with thrilling and heart-stirring notes above the deafening din of temporal calamity. It was likewise from his prison, amid the weakness and persecution of the infant church, that the beloved disciple of the Lord sang forth, expanding into all its particularities his general promise, that his church should not fail, and announcing all the glorious facts of its victories and triumphs.

In both prosperous and disastrous times, men require to be warned; for in both they are naturally reckless. In the one they cry out, "Soul, thou hast many goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (LUKE xii. 19.) In the other they say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." It were needless to instance the solemn warnings given to the sons of Israel, and which we may consider as addressed to ourselves also, under similar circumstances, with, however, this additional weight, that having been verified once, they are of all things most certain to take place again, wherever their application is called for. These, therefore, are our warning prophets too; and our preachers delivering forth their solemn admonitions, expounding to us their awful fulfilment, and applying them to our own times and circumstances, public or private, are an unfailing body of prophets, to whom, if we listen not, neither will we, though one of the prophets of old rose from the dead. And not only have we these among ourselves, but there hath visited us a preacher such as never preached to a reckless world before, on repentance and judgment to come, since the days of Noah; a preacher who bears the signs of his commission stamped upon the man, both in body and in mind; a preacher who,

like Adam, can speak from experience of the sorrows of ruin and degradation; a preacher who has been preaching ever since the Church of Christ upon earth began, and shall preach until the end draw nigh. What? Is there indeed a corner of Christendom unpenetrated by that mysterious stranger, who, bearing in his peculiar features the lineaments of Abraham, and thus at a glance announcing to us from what high estate he hath fallen; cherishing in his spirit all the sullen pride of ruined greatness; exhibiting in his dealings all the caution and timidity of the despised stranger; attracting, by his attachment to the carnalities of his abrogated law, continued mockery and derision; moving, by his superstition, his obstinacy, and his blindness, the pity of some, the contempt of others, the neglect of all; deprived even of the only ordained assurance of pardon by being denied all means of sacrifice; and holding in his hand the word of God, without a spirit to understand it;—is there, indeed, any church in Christendom, before which the Jew, this awful monitor, has never appeared? Oh! his prophetical character seems to cling to him still; everywhere he appears as God's herald to warn against disobedience, to proclaim his judgments, and wherever he appears, there should be, as in the presence of the prophets of old, humiliation and awe. Thus doth

this preacher, traversing daily Christ's kingdom, unceasingly admonish churches and individuals; and, standing in our luxurious cities, should be to us as Jonah amid Nineveh, summoning us to repentance and mourning.

The word of God, once gone forth, never returns to him void; it abides for ever among us, and generation after generation finds it still stronger from past fulfilment, and still widening in extent of application. Were the threats thrown out against Ephesus, Laodicea, and the rest of their company, accomplished in them alone? have they found no object since? has their fiery indignation found no fuel, and become extinct? Where then is Edessa, where is Alexandria, where is Carthage, those bright and burning lights of Christendom in their day? Where are they indeed! It would be more easy to discover the ruins of Carthage, than to detect a fragment of her church. And have these threats terminated here, or are they not rather confronting the churches of this day, ready to hunt down as noble game as before? Are they not prophecies more awful than ever, more sure from fulfilment, more terribly significant from the melancholy detail by which they have already been repeatedly illustrated and verified? Doubly and trebly have we been warned compared with our predecessors; shall

we then by an equal length of resistance meet with but an equal punishment, or not rather suffer in proportion to our full insight into the meaning, and our experience of the certain consequences of the neglect of the admonition?

The proving of our hearts by prophecy is intimately connected with its comfort and its warning. We shall shew our faith, and manifest our obedience according as we accept it, to minister to our hopes and fears. If God's sure promise cannot avail to raise our fainting hearts in tribulation, nor to subdue their pride, and turn them unto him in our hours of prosperity, we are none of his: we have been weighed and found wanting, we have been proved, and have come out dross. But there remains a further proof, applicable to us at all times, and not the less sure, because we are not aware at the moment that we are under trial; not the less searching, because our hearts are open in all their unsuspiciousness, and we have not time to shut them before our visitor has entered, and all our secrets have been revealed. Do we, in our study of these oracles of God, keep in view the prime object of feeding a growing faith by observing where they have been accomplished; of creating and nursing in our hearts a cheerful and unshaken confidence in his protection, an entire devotion to his majesty, his

power, and his truth, so that we may be found with our loins girded, and lights burning, in the day of his visitation; and thus do we look forward with a godly hope, and the earnest expectation of the faithful creature; or do we go to the perusal with a vain curiosity, with that vulgar propensity of restless man, which sent him of old to the oracle, to the auspices, to the diviner; for thus have men before now turned the pure word of God into an astrologer's almanack, and even into an impostor's credentials? It is highly necessary to distinguish these different motives, because such critical periods as that in which we are living, are peculiarly apt to call them all into action, even in one and the same bosom; and according as they predominate is the judgment of our trial. Let us, therefore, endeavour to detect this lurking enemy of the truth, so that we may be enabled to eject him from our bosoms.

Let us try our hearts, and seek there the impression which is made upon it by the engrossing events of the times in which we are living: does it in a sure and certain faith in the end say, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," accepting equally joy and sorrow, looking to the completion of all prophecy to be accomplished on earth, with the same tranquillity and steadiness as we do to its final completion in heaven, when this mortality shall

have put on immortality, and this corruption put on incorruption? Is the sorrow swallowed up in the contemplation of the bliss to come? Is the joy chastened as an earnest of everlasting spiritual blessedness? Again, let us enquire of our understanding. Does it cautiously beware of mistaking the nearness of events for magnitude, their interest to ourselves for importance to the Church of Christ; acknowledging that its limited powers can never ascertain their real importance, even in a political light, until long after they have passed, and dragged in their train a number of pregnant consequences; how much less then in a prophetical light, where the view must be extended to an end far, very far, beyond the most acute and intent gaze of the earthly politician? Do we eject thus both from heart and head all minor considerations; reckon, under this view, the Church of Christ our only country — its triumphs our only interest? Assuredly if we indulge in any more narrow contemplation, if we exert not this catholicity of feeling, our error will be little less gross than that of the Jew, whom national pride, and worldly considerations, rendered utterly blind to the real end of the prophecies vouchsafed to his church; and we shall be driven to despair by those calamities which usher in the triumphs of the church,

even as the fight precedes the victory. Our eye of flesh shall look upon earth, and behold trouble, and darkness, and dimness of anguish; and our carnal heart, seeing all its proud hopes laid low, the cherished signs of the Lord's coming all falsified, will, like that of the Jew, turn away in unbelief from the real heralds of his advent. Such heralds are already in the world, and one of the most obvious is the communication existing, and still increasing both in extent and intensity, between all the sons of Adam, divided though they be by sea and by land, by tongues and by customs. They are again once more gathering to a common head. Even our own lifetime suffices to see a manifest increase here: almost daily the widening prospect takes in at least a nook hitherto unexplored by sight; and every nook is an hour or a day embodied, as it were, and visibly taken from the delay of our Lord's coming. In looking with hope and joy on such a prospect, we cannot err: there is nothing in its widening extent which can nourish a carnal feeling; for it is obvious that such extent, if it be due to peace and commerce and good will amongst men, is also equally owing to wars, ruined empires, subjugated nations,—to pestilence, to famine, and to the sword. Having received our sign from God, let us, like his prophets, be content with it;

let us see in faithful hope the day of our Lord, and be glad. Palpable, though undeveloped, events are in our possession; we hold in our hands, as it were, the baby Jesus, and with our dying breath we may cry, "Lord! now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Helpless may the Church of Christ appear at darker moments, helpless even as seemed that babe; it may have to endure spiteful mockings, to be a sign to be rejected, yea, may be nailed to the cross. But upon all this the eye of faith will look without a shrinking of doubt or dismay, and will continue to look to the end, while every carnal eye shall long have been averted in perplexity, disappointment, and disbelief. Even at such a moment, perhaps, when men's hearts are failing them from fear, when the strong are bearing up through faith against the burden of calamitous days, when the weak are desponding, when the apostate is triumphant; even then, in the midst of the fiery trial, that prophecy of the 1260 years, so much the concern of our days, which has been shifted by expounders continually to and fro over the range of history, shall all at once, with a noise of thunder, snap into its place, and every part and joint find its proper position and coincidence; all become symmetrical and clear to the refutation of the infidel, the confirmation of the doubtful,

the triumph of the believer. Glorious and heart-moving is the view which God hath given unto the Christian church by his word of prophecy, uttered since the world began; the future hope of the Patriarch and the Jew, is our past and assured certainty. To them this word came in various ways, at various times; uttered now and then, and here and there; detached, progressive. But to us all has settled into one continuous whole; and comparing ourselves with the Jew, we are men indeed compared with children, for we see the tendency of all that discipline, and all those tasks, which he obeyed, not from his understanding, but because it was the will of his schoolmaster. Instead of looking forward with idle curiosity, let us fix our eyes upon this magnificent spectacle of prophecy, and filling our hearts with the holy feelings of joy and thankfulness, and appreciation of God's majesty, which it should excite, then carry on our eyes in lowly and cheerful hope to the end. A view hitherto denied to man has been revealed to us, and blessed are our eyes which have seen things denied to the sight of Adam, of Abraham, and of David. Jew indeed after Jew saw the progress of God's promises, but still at the best he was ascending within the tower of God's temple, catching but through occasional loopholes the sights and sounds

from without. But we are they who stand upon the summit of that tower, and looking down on pinnacles and turrets, buttresses, and foundations of that glorious fabric, see them all conspiring in grand and terrific harmony.

Finally, my brethren, let us learn to look to the end from a right understanding of the beginning: so shall we look forward in faith, in joy, and not in vain curiosity and hankering; so shall we have grace to do our duties with all steadiness and single-mindedness in our own sphere and days, that, if at any time the appearance of the world shall say, in signs not to be misunderstood, that the Lord is coming quickly, we may joyfully exclaim, in answer, with his beloved and prophetic disciple, "Even so! come, Lord Jesus!" Thus may our loins be girded about, and lights burning, as men that wait for their Lord; for the Son of man cometh at an hour that we think not.

# SERMON IV.

## ON SCRIPTURE.

2 THESS. ii. 15.

*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.*

WE have already shewn how the fundamental points of God's word were revealed to his church from the first. The accessions made to it by successive revelations will appear as we examine severally its articles; meanwhile an important consideration calls for our attention. This is the means which God hath appointed for its sure transmission from generation to generation, and the use we are bound to make of such an instrument of knowledge.

There was nothing in the patriarchal stage which required the committing of God's word to writing, (supposing that art to have been then known), whether we regard the quantity of revelation, or the number of persons through whom it had to pass, or the circumstances of its preachers. The quantity, as we have seen, depended upon the original

promise made to Adam, combined with the peculiar circumstances under which he received it. Now, both these he himself continued declaring to the world for 900 years, and between him and Abraham (to whom the promise was renewed with still greater clearness,) occur but two successions, namely, of Methuselah and Shem.* The circumstances of its preachers were peculiar indeed: for when has the world heard such a preacher as the first Adam, if we except the second Adam, to whom he bears, in many points, a singular relation, arising from his having been the corrupter where our Lord was the restorer. For, first of all, he only (with this exception) came to his hearers from a former state of bliss and innocence: how vivid and heart-stirring then must have been his setting forth of the happiness and glory promised hereafter;—what conviction must have impressed his hearers, who listened to one who had actually known by experience what he stated, and not drawn upon the aspirations of a fervid imagination. He only, too, (with the same exception) knew from personal experience the extremes of exultation and abasement; knew to all its extent the degradation of sin and death, and tasted

* Methuselah was cotemporary with Adam, 243 years; Shem with Methuselah, 97 years; Abraham with Shem, 50 y-

# SERMON IV.

## ON SCRIPTURE.

2 Thess. ii. 15.

*Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.*

We have already shewn how the fundamental points of God's word were revealed to his church from the first. The accessions made to it by successive revelations will appear as we examine severally its articles; meanwhile an important consideration calls for our attention. This is the means which God hath appointed for its sure transmission from generation to generation, and the use we are bound to make of such an instrument of knowledge.

There was nothing in the patriarchal stage which required the committing of God's word to writing, (supposing that art to have been then known), whether we regard the quantity of revelation, or the number of persons through whom it had to pass, or the circumstances of its preachers. The quantity, as we have seen, depended upon the original

promise made to Adam, combined with the peculiar circumstances under which he received it. Now, both these he himself continued declaring to the world for 900 years, and between him and Abraham (to whom the promise was renewed with still greater clearness,) occur but two successions, namely, of Methuselah and Shem.* The circumstances of its preachers were peculiar indeed: for when has the world heard such a preacher as the first Adam, if we except the second Adam, to whom he bears, in many points, a singular relation, arising from his having been the corrupter where our Lord was the restorer. For, first of all, he only (with this exception) came to his hearers from a former state of bliss and innocence: how vivid and heart-stirring then must have been his setting forth of the happiness and glory promised hereafter;—what conviction must have impressed his hearers, who listened to one who had actually known by experience what he stated, and not drawn upon the aspirations of a fervid imagination. He only, too, (with the same exception) knew from personal experience the extremes of exultation and abasement; knew to all its extent the degradation of sin and death, and tasted

* Methuselah was cotemporary with Adam, 243 years; Shem with Methuselah, 97 years; Abraham with Shem, 50 years.

the cup of human agony to the very dregs. He alone (with the same exception) could sympathise with the infirmities of all mankind, for in him they all had their spring; he was father, not only of their bodies, but, alas, of all the sins and pains of those bodies. How passionate, how powerful, must have been his preaching to the inheritors of his own self-procured sinfulness and death. How affectionate his exhortation, both as natural and spiritual father, to resist that plague which he himself had brought upon them. How deep, how edifying, must have been his penitence. How lively his thankfulness to God, his pardoner; how joyful his hope in a Redeemer; how profound his humility; how impressive, therefore, his example, which must thus have borne to the conduct of his hearers, somewhat of that relation which our Lord's bears to ours. It bore testimony to his revelation. How unweariedly watchful must have been his care over that flock, that he might bring into the fold of eternal life the sheep whom his own sin had scattered and driven astray. How intimate, too, must have been his knowledge of the human breast: he indeed knew what was in the heart of man, but it was as his corrupter, and not as his maker; it was as having tasted perfect innocence before he fell into guilt, and not from the omniscience of divine purity.

Finally, his very presence gave evidence to his doctrine: it was to his hearers what the written word is to us, together with all the proofs, collateral and posterior, of its authenticity. The sixth part of a man's life of those days did not elapse between him and Noah, the preacher of righteousness. And when between the first and second Adam arose a greater preacher than he, unweariedly in the earlier part of his ministry warning men of the wrath and judgment to come, and during the latter part setting forth the dreadful accomplishment of God's justice? If Adam could tell of the bliss of Paradise, and stir up his descendants to struggle and regain that bliss in a world to come everlasting, so Noah could speak of the horrors of the flood, and entreat his posterity to beware of the final judgment of the life hereafter. Thus both the mercy of God, and the justice of God, were preached in the patriarchal church, with a power, and under circumstances, which rendered quite unnecessary any commission of the word to writing. In Abraham the original promise is both confirmed, amplified, and defined: the Redeemer is to spring from his seed, and a new intervention of God, with an enlargement of his mercy, has now to be handed down to his posterity. But so shortened is human life, that such tradition could not go far without

corruption. After, therefore, repeating his covenant with Isaac and Jacob, God put the finishing crown to it in his communication with Moses, caused the law to be registered in writing, and Holy Scripture (in the strict sense of the word) commenced, after three intervening successions * from Abraham, and six from Adam. But it is necessary to bear in mind that this law, which in all its provisions, civil and religious, peculiarly regarded the abode of the favoured family in the land of promise, did not take the place of the creed of the patriarchal revelation, but only surrounded it as a vineyard with a hedge, to protect it from the devastation of the superstition without. The ordinances are put upon a more settled footing; the doctrines, if not expressed, yet lie in it in such a manner, that, supposing them to be once known, their places are immediately found.† The whole faith, therefore, of the patriarchal church existing at the time of the delivery of the law, must have existed ever after. But that nothing may be wanting, God maintained a continual succession of prophets, who, as they taught, appealed perpetually to these doc-

* Jacob, Levi, Amram.

† Thus the article of the resurrection of the dead, lies in Exod. iii. 15, as shown by our Lord. Matt. xxii. 32.

trines, and if these appear to be expressed more clearly, and to grow in number towards the end of the Jewish dispensation, it is not because they only now began to be entertained (as some paradoxical theorists would have it) but because prophecy became, from circumstances already referred to,* so much more abundant in quantity, and also, from growing infidelity, so much more didactic in its nature. The very fact too, which all divines allow, of the later prophecies hinting these doctrines, shows that they were addressed to a people to whom they were familiar. Thus the word of God came to the Jew most abundantly indeed. It came to him by tradition from his fathers, which was farther maintained by the teaching of the prophets, and hinting of the law; it came to him by direct precepts from the moral part of the law; it came to him reflected from innumerable points of the ceremonial law; and all this in such a manner, that a desire of knowledge was sure to be rewarded with knowledge, and increase to earn increase. Even the most inert portion of it, its straightest and yet most unnecessary injunctions, had its effect. When the spiritual-minded man compared this with the aspi-

---

* See Sermon III.

rations which had been raised in him by that portion which bore spiritual interpretation, he felt an inexpressible yearning after something better; he discerned a designed incompleteness; he was conscious of being in tutelage. Every reading of the law thus supplied him with elements of thought, which carried him on far beyond the point at which it ceased to speak openly: it hinted most abundantly, but fulfilled most scantily. Hence he was continually led on to the spirituality of the glorious promises made in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and looked out for the redemption and the life to come.

But now to the Christian all this imperfection has become perfection; the obstacle of carnal ordinances has been removed, and unlimited range is given to the spirit. All that the Patriarch dimly sought in prospect, all that the Jew doubtfully handled through the veils of type and prophecy, all has been supplied, and more than the heart of man could have contemplated and desired; the flood-gates are burst with the abundance of the stream, yea, all the windows of heaven have been opened, and the whole earth is covered with the waters of life. The word of God, consigned to writing by the Apostles of our Lord, and their disciples, hath come down to us, and will go down beyond us to remotest ages, delivered to successive generations by a faithful succession of

members of his church, the existence of which he has assured to us for ever. Having received a gift so inestimable in itself, so wonderfully provided too with the means of transmission, let us with grateful hearts search into its riches, and learn to apply to our use its exceeding benefits.

For this purpose we will first consider Scripture as a book of knowledge, and compare it with the most instructive and interesting of the different classes of the writings of men.

I. Since it applies to our morals, teaching us our duties, let us compare it with a work of this nature. Let us, then, take up such a book, the most perfect let it be which the unevangelised mind of man is capable of producing. Let us go through it, comparing sentence with sentence, investigating its principles, proving its arguments, imbibing all its knowledge, and possessing ourselves to the utmost of its spirit. Let us rise up from it with a mind exalted far beyond its former pitch, and burning with a desire to put into practice that to which both heart and head have given so devotedly their sanction; and when we come into the world of practise, alas! is not the intoxicating dream soon over? Do we not feel deceived, deluded, and our high notions supplanted by an angry feeling, as if we had been imposed upon, or by the despondency of disappoint-

ment. For on the very threshold we are encountered with obstacles which had never been calculated upon, and find, both in ourselves and others, infirmities of which we had but slight, if any, notice; and a depth of corruption, of which but the surface had been presented. Above all, we want an immoveable ground of principle; we want the pervading spirit of which the virtues which were recommended are the body: for not only are those virtues opposed, but their very foundation, such as it is, is too slight to withstand the attack. It is battered, it reels, it falls,—and with it all the proud towering fabric reared upon it, of vain-glorious virtue, comes with a crash to the ground. The only foundation is faith in God, and the only book which can supply this is the word of God: that book comes from him to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, who knows all our infirmities, and hath sounded all the depths of our corruption; who hath fashioned us behind and before, and from whom no secret can be hidden. Informed with his word, we are informed with his spirit, by which that word was dictated; we have his grace infused upon our hearts, so that we draw thence not only the will and desire to do, but the wisdom and power also. It forewarns us of all our infirmities, points out all our dangers, and sends us into action prepared to encounter the worst which can

befall. We are, by the real view of our infirmities, humbled in order to be exalted; whereas that deluding book of human wisdon exalted but in order to humble. The word of men's wisdom moved us, by a number of unconnected principles, as a dead body may be put into motion by application to its different members; but the word of God is the spirit of life within, which gives motion to every part of the living body.—So different is this book from a book of moral precept, in which rank half-believers are so fond of considering it.

II. Since the word of God commands and forbids, let us next compare it with a code of laws. Now in the case of all human codes, a law may be learned, and we need not refer to it again; and indeed its principal laws are known and obeyed by the great majority without having seen the written code at all, but they have learned them from their conversation with the society which is founded upon them. But can this be done with any part of Scripture? Let us take the most legal part of it, the decalogue; will any one, who has ever reflected upon the nature of its all-seeing Giver, assert that any one commandment there comes to him with the one unvaried meaning (which it is the virtue of a human law to have,) which is expressed by the outward letter. Does he not rather feel that the

searcher of all hearts who forbids murder, (for instance,) forbids also by that same commandment all thought and feeling which by any possibility may ultimately lead to it; and that therefore the most gentle, the most innocent, the most charitable among us, may recite this commandment every day of his life, and find in it fresh application to himself, and cry out on God for pardon for the past, and grace for the future? From human law we learn what to do, and what not to do; but from divine law also what to think, and what not to think. Doing requires a particular occasion; thinking is always at hand, always to be regulated, and therefore the law of God at every moment applicable, and to be appealed to. But if such be the case with the legal and comparatively carnal part of God's word, that we must have it ever in our hands, being required to be our own judges, that we may not be judged, (while we leave the exact knowledge of human laws entirely to the magistrates appointed to administer them,) what shall we say to the spiritual part? what to the Gospel? This is addressed to the most secret and inward part of man; in order fully to obtain its light we must bare to it the inmost recesses of our hearts: and who, with the longest life and most uninterrupted habit of self-examination, ever arrived at its bottom? Who then but a mad-

man would talk of a single reference, or of a second-hand knowledge as sufficient here. And yet this is but half of the instruction laid out for us by the Gospel, which not only helps us to search the spirit of man, but also informs us of the spirit of God; and who hath ever fathomed that depth?—still more, who shall combine the knowledge of the two, and bring every turn and winding of his own spirit under cognizance of that unsearchable spirit? No son of man is able; but every son of man, as having a spirit hereafter to be judged by that spirit, must do this to the utmost of his ability, and anticipate, as far as in him lies, the judgment of the last day; therefore must God's written word be continually in his hand, that it may be written progressively on his heart. So far does it differ from a code of human law.

III. Since God's word contains a history of his church, and especially of its divine founder, let us compare it with a history.

In the reading of history, however amused and instructed, and even interested, we may be, yet, considered with regard to our individual welfare, we are but little concerned. Let it even be the history of our own country, let our own forefathers be amongst the most celebrated names, let our own native spot be the scene of some of its grandest

events; we lay down the volume indeed with a glow perhaps of enthusiasm and personal vanity, but we never take it up again but for occasional reference, or for particular passages, or to refresh memory by a rapid glance of the eye, or to indulge the above-mentioned passion;—we never read it carefully over and over again, compare passages, weigh sentences, with the interest of one who could learn his own fate from it. Nay, let even this history be one of grand and critical events, which not only bear a great resemblance to those which are passing before our eyes, but also have evidently given birth to them, so that we can trace an unbroken chain from one to the other; still we do not feel individually affected, but merely as members of general society. Having obtained a clear knowledge of the events, and drawn our deductions, we close the book with a consciousness of access to our knowledge no doubt, and with a renewed interest with regard to the aspect of our own times; and we may recur often to it, as a new light reflected from other portions of history or from passing events clears up any portion, or throws it into glowing relief; still the feeling amounts to little more than curiosity: we perhaps strongly or jocularly express our sentiments by calling it the book of fate. Yet is this only politically speaking: we do not really feel our fortunes

suspended upon those events, nor consider our individual welfare of body and mind as flowing from them; consequently in this, as in the former case, the first reading, if it be not the last also, is the only thorough reading: and however we may improve our information by further recurrence, yet at no time is either the interest of that vivid force, or the knowledge of that practical nature, as to have any sensible influence upon moments not dedicated to the especial contemplation of such a subject.

But let us now take up the word of God, the history of the kingdom of heaven. Every event here is one of a grand and brilliant series, tending to our own salvation. The actors in them are God the Father and his blessed Son, and men, our spiritual forefathers, whom death, instead of dividing from us, unites. The public events, even of the most worldly complexion,—as the rise and fall of cities and empires, of Tyre, of Babylon, and of Persia,—as recorded there, all visibly bear to the establishment of the kingdom of Christ's gospel upon earth, are seen at this moment in their blessed effects upon us and around us, and can be traced tending onward still to brilliant points of merciful dispensation beyond us, both as to place and time. The private events are chiefly those which conduct our Saviour to his cross, give continual occasion to words from

his mouth of inexpressible comfort, of peace and joy to every earnest reader, and contain those sufferings which perfected him as a high priest appointed to offer up an atonement for our sins. Thus our own salvation is the continual theme, the means of it the continual lesson. And it is the salvation, not of the body, or things of the body, of which the mind intently engaged in any study never thinks, but of that immortal part, which, while we read, we feel within us weighing and discerning the spirit of the words, and trembling or exulting at their import; of that part which we feel indeed and alone to be ourselves, from which we are conscious that we never can be separated, now or hereafter. This book, proceeding from the spirit of God, meets our spirit with his spirit; and what end can there be, what satiety of instruction and enjoyment, in such a communion? Neither the first nor the hundredth and first perusal will satisfy.—It is a book for life.

IV. We may also consider the word of God as the biography of a friend, who laid down his life for us; as the testament of a friend bequeathing us inestimable and everlasting treasures; as the letter of a friend from a distant land, to which we ourselves must one day go. Under this and every other view in which we can possibly place it, we shall find it an object of continual study. The more we look at it,

the more it expands. Some fresh quality of mercy, some new channel of grace, some uncontemplated importance of fact suggests itself at each perusal; and innumerable are the modes of joy and sorrow, endless their combinations, which we thence derive: of sorrow for the sufferings of our deliverer,—of sorrow, for our own sinfulness to which those sufferings were due; but of joy for our Redeemer's return to life and glory, and joy for our deliverance thereby so wonderfully accomplished.

So different, so inappreciably superior is this book to every other,—and so different, so inexpressibly more ardent and persevering must be our study of it. And now, let us ask of ourselves, is it thus studied? Alas! but by one or two here and there; and they will confess that their ardour and perseverance is far below what they are conscious it should be, and that they never can hope to realize, however they may, and will to the last endeavour, the notion and plan which they have set before them. But do we even hear it talked of as every book of general and powerful interest is talked of. Is it a book which even the indolent and superficial betake themselves to, because it is so common, that ignorance upon it is disgraceful. Alas! neither is it so. It is a book, the mention of which, is studiously shunned in general society; it is a book of which

the world will plead ignorance without a blush. Various are the causes of this treatment. It requires much study, and most men will give but little to any book; its subject is spiritual, and most men are natural. These are plain and obvious causes; but one cause there is not so obvious, but fully as efficacious, and therefore more insidiously besetting us: it is the notion that we are sufficiently acquainted with its contents already. The absurdity of such a notion has, I hope, appeared sufficiently from what has been just stated. But as its effects are grievously important, let us examine it more particularly.

Of what nature is the prevailing knowledge of the contents of this book? It is a loose, traditional information which floats about in society, obtained orally and not by reading, and known more from being at times unavoidably encountered, than by being ever purposely sought; its highest and purest source is nothing more than the attention which decency demands men to pay to public worship, and this operates but feebly. It mainly comes to men in the great traditional stream of modes and opinions, delivered down by one worldly generation to another; and thus reaches the pupil in the same channel with the law of the land, with the conventional usages of society, and other accompaniments which entirely

strip God's word of its awful and peculiar distinction from man's, degrade its solemn character, and assign it a place scarcely above that of the established canons of society. Such a knowledge must be not only most imperfect, but erroneous also; but this is the very sort of knowledge which administers the most certain obstacle to all improvement or correction; this knowledge is adapted to man's corrupt inclinations, it satisfies, therefore, all his enquiries. To alter our notions is to confess ourselves in the wrong, and this our vanity will not allow; at the same time it requires exertion, and this our indolence will not endure: thus we cling to our ignorance, and in religion mistaking the familiarity of terms (which have been thrust on our ears whether we would or not,) for the meaning of them (which we have never taken the trouble to examine,) whisper in our careless and overweening spirit, before our teacher, perhaps, has opened his lips, "I know all that is going to be said already." This presumption of knowledge prevents too many from consulting the original at all, and they who carry the prejudices of imperfectly acquired, and therefore corrupt knowledge, to the reading of it, are beset with difficulties, which it requires great patience and exercise of good sense and judgment to surmount.

The great danger of a superficial reading in this

the world will plead ignorance without a blush. Various are the causes of this treatment. It requires much study, and most men will give but little to any book; its subject is spiritual, and most men are natural. These are plain and obvious causes; but one cause there is not so obvious, but fully as efficacious, and therefore more insidiously besetting us: it is the notion that we are sufficiently acquainted with its contents already. The absurdity of such a notion has, I hope, appeared sufficiently from what has been just stated. But as its effects are grievously important, let us examine it more particularly.

Of what nature is the prevailing knowledge of the contents of this book? It is a loose, traditional information which floats about in society, obtained orally and not by reading, and known more from being at times unavoidably encountered, than by being ever purposely sought; its highest and purest source is nothing more than the attention which decency demands men to pay to public worship, and this operates but feebly. It mainly comes to men in the great traditional stream of modes and opinions, delivered down by one worldly generation to another; and thus reaches the pupil in the same channel with the law of the land, with the conventional usages of society, and other accompaniments which entirely

strip God's word of its awful and peculiar distinction from man's, degrade its solemn character, and assign it a place scarcely above that of the established canons of society. Such a knowledge must be not only most imperfect, but erroneous also; but this is the very sort of knowledge which administers the most certain obstacle to all improvement or correction; this knowledge is adapted to man's corrupt inclinations, it satisfies, therefore, all his enquiries. To alter our notions is to confess ourselves in the wrong, and this our vanity will not allow; at the same time it requires exertion, and this our indolence will not endure: thus we cling to our ignorance, and in religion mistaking the familiarity of terms (which have been thrust on our ears whether we would or not,) for the meaning of them (which we have never taken the trouble to examine,) whisper in our careless and overweening spirit, before our teacher, perhaps, has opened his lips, "I know all that is going to be said already." This presumption of knowledge prevents too many from consulting the original at all, and they who carry the prejudices of imperfectly acquired, and therefore corrupt knowledge, to the reading of it, are beset with difficulties, which it requires great patience and exercise of good sense and judgment to surmount.

The great danger of a superficial reading in this

ment. For on the very threshold we are encountered with obstacles which had never been calculated upon, and find, both in ourselves and others, infirmities of which we had but slight, if any, notice; and a depth of corruption, of which but the surface had been presented. Above all, we want an immoveable ground of principle; we want the pervading spirit of which the virtues which were recommended are the body: for not only are those virtues opposed, but their very foundation, such as it is, is too slight to withstand the attack. It is battered, it reels, it falls,—and with it all the proud towering fabric reared upon it, of vain-glorious virtue, comes with a crash to the ground. The only foundation is faith in God, and the only book which can supply this is the word of God: that book comes from him to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, who knows all our infirmities, and hath sounded all the depths of our corruption; who hath fashioned us behind and before, and from whom no secret can be hidden. Informed with his word, we are informed with his spirit, by which that word was dictated; we have his grace infused upon our hearts, so that we draw thence not only the will and desire to do, but the wisdom and power also. It forewarns us of all our infirmities, points out all our dangers, and sends us into action prepared to encounter the worst which can

befall. We are, by the real view of our infirmities, humbled in order to be exalted; whereas that deluding book of human wisdon exalted but in order to humble. The word of men's wisdom moved us, by a number of unconnected principles, as a dead body may be put into motion by application to its different members; but the word of God is the spirit of life within, which gives motion to every part of the living body.—So different is this book from a book of moral precept, in which rank half-believers are so fond of considering it.

II. Since the word of God commands and forbids, let us next compare it with a code of laws. Now in the case of all human codes, a law may be learned, and we need not refer to it again; and indeed its principal laws are known and obeyed by the great majority without having seen the written code at all, but they have learned them from their conversation with the society which is founded upon them. But can this be done with any part of Scripture? Let us take the most legal part of it, the decalogue; will any one, who has ever reflected upon the nature of its all-seeing Giver, assert that any one commandment there comes to him with the one unvaried meaning (which it is the virtue of a human law to have,) which is expressed by the outward letter. Does he not rather feel that the

searcher of all hearts who forbids murder, (for instance,) forbids also by that same commandment all thought and feeling which by any possibility may ultimately lead to it; and that therefore the most gentle, the most innocent, the most charitable among us, may recite this commandment every day of his life, and find in it fresh application to himself, and cry out on God for pardon for the past, and grace for the future? From human law we learn what to do, and what not to do; but from divine law also what to think, and what not to think. Doing requires a particular occasion; thinking is always at hand, always to be regulated, and therefore the law of God at every moment applicable, and to be appealed to. But if such be the case with the legal and comparatively carnal part of God's word, that we must have it ever in our hands, being required to be our own judges, that we may not be judged, (while we leave the exact knowledge of human laws entirely to the magistrates appointed to administer them,) what shall we say to the spiritual part? what to the Gospel? This is addressed to the most secret and inward part of man; in order fully to obtain its light we must bare to it the inmost recesses of our hearts: and who, with the longest life and most uninterrupted habit of self-examination, ever arrived at its bottom? Who then but a mad-

man would talk of a single reference, or of a second-hand knowledge as sufficient here. And yet this is but half of the instruction laid out for us by the Gospel, which not only helps us to search the spirit of man, but also informs us of the spirit of God; and who hath ever fathomed that depth?—still more, who shall combine the knowledge of the two, and bring every turn and winding of his own spirit under cognizance of that unsearchable spirit? No son of man is able; but every son of man, as having a spirit hereafter to be judged by that spirit, must do this to the utmost of his ability, and anticipate, as far as in him lies, the judgment of the last day; therefore must God's written word be continually in his hand, that it may be written progressively on his heart. So far does it differ from a code of human law.

III. Since God's word contains a history of his church, and especially of its divine founder, let us compare it with a history.

In the reading of history, however amused and instructed, and even interested, we may be, yet, considered with regard to our individual welfare, we are but little concerned. Let it even be the history of our own country, let our own forefathers be amongst the most celebrated names, let our own native spot be the scene of some of its grandest

fear. And now, finally, let me dismiss you with an appeal to that name which ye bear. Ye are called Christians. This term, so familiar as to be tossed about from one to another, bestowed indiscriminately on every one around us, nay, in many mouths even synonymous with man, what does it imply? It implies the sworn soldier and servant of Him, who is God, Saviour, Priest, King, Prophet, Maker, and Judge of the world. In it is comprehended the extreme of earthly humiliation and of heavenly glory: in it we are reminded of man's fall and recovery, Satan's triumph and defeat, of the conquered powers of darkness, of the conquering powers of light, of the kingdom of God upon earth, and in the world to come everlasting. Keeping in sight this meaning of the title which ye bear, look into your own hearts, see their irresolution, rebelliousness, confliction of duty with passion, of spirit with flesh, of darkness with light, and fly to the remedy which God hath set before you, even his pure word. Let this title coming on your ears be a trumpet-call to duty, rousing all your spirit within you, as faithful soldiers of your heavenly Master. And thus, even thus, by knowledge, by goodness, by the armour of God on the right hand and on the left, may we have Christ abiding with us, ever by his precious word through his Holy Spirit, making us wise unto salvation.

# SERMON V.

## ON SCRIPTURE.

2 TRIN. ii. 15.

*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word.*

THE necessity of a continual study of Scripture, has appeared from its peculiar character as a book, in whatever class we choose to consider it. But this will appear still more clear on considering not merely its subject, but the manner in which that subject is treated. We shall find that there is a peculiarity in the arrangement of its matter in the Holy volume, which will require a more particular study than would be necessary under other circumstances.

For this purpose let us only consider what is the nature of the most celebrated works which profess to teach us the duties of life. They are regular systems; precept is drawn regularly from precept, and all proceeds by an unbroken chain of reasoning, from

some fundamental proposition. In this consists their excellence; but how unsuitable is all this to the purposes of life. Here, so far from meeting with any thing like system, every thing is a contradiction to it. We find ourselves in a wilderness of circumstances, between which the mind can at the moment trace no imaginable connection, amid a confused train of thoughts and passions brought into play by unforeseen objects, without visible mutual influence, intermingled without rational order, exciting without permanent effect. Can we wonder, therefore, at the slight dominion which such books, however admirable, have ever exercised upon practice; exhibiting, as they do, a regular chain of consequences which is never witnessed in real life; addressing themselves to that which is comparatively so little consulted—the understanding—and leaving entirely unaffected that grand and constant source of action, the heart: we may even go further, and assert, that as far as they do influence us, they throw the events of life, with which we daily come into close contact, to too great a distance, by making them subjects of theory, and thus lead us to speculate when we should be practising; and to think, when we should be feeling. The book which shall have a deep abiding practical influence on real life must reflect its image, must present that real mix-

ture of facts, thoughts, and feelings, which is found to exist there, and while it does not neglect the proper appeals to the understanding, will hold prominently forward noble and influential motives to the heart;—such a book is Holy Scripture.

In this work the wisdom of God has consulted our weakness, which in those books it was the object of the pride of men to disallow. It would seem as if system had been purposely avoided. Of the two portions of which it consists, the one, the Gospels, is a narrative of facts, told as they occurred, which as they arrest the attention, and challenge the understanding in their important bearings, engage also the heart, incidentally as it were, in the great stream of doctrine with which they are pervaded. The other, the Epistles, that great doctrinal storehouse, is composed of occasional letters, full of continual reference to facts, abounding with appeals to the affections, and so seldom indulging in any lengthened train of argument, that we are commonly left to gather the doctrine, by putting together what is there detached, and by supplying what was evidently presupposed. This provision of God's wisdom becomes still more apparent on turning to any of the regular systems of divinity. How cold, how formal, how unpractical they appear; yet the doctrine is pre-

cisely the same, having been drawn from its pages. It is the absence of facts, and artificial regularity of arrangement, which causes the difference. In the former case we were presented with real beings; our Lord and his apostles moved before our eyes; the doctrines came forth, as called by circumstances,—always interesting, oftentimes most heart-stirring,—from their mouths, or as illustrated with vivid beauty and truth in their behaviour. The doctrines were thus associated with facts, and made their impression upon the heart with all the solidity of substance. We were presented not only with teachers, but with their hearers also. We listened to the one, we sympathised with the other. When our Saviour spoke, we stood amid the train of Apostles and disciples; when St. Paul reproved the Corinthians, we were interested in their sorrow; when he commended them, we participated in their joy: when he advised Timothy, we joined with him in fearful and trembling responsibility. Every little fact, whether told directly out, or only disclosed by allusion, drew us into a nearer fellowship, giving additional substance of flesh to our conceptions, awakening our social feelings, and thus opening all the channels of the heart to the reception of the doctrine. But in the other case, our Lord becomes almost an abstract being; the goodly train of Apos-

tles, disciples, hearers, and assembled churches, vanishes at once; facts are excluded, and thus, while we have to follow the studied arrangement of the compiler, and are debarred from the interest of making our own inferences; our heart, at the same time, has scarcely anything palpable presented to it.

This disposition of its matter, will indeed require more attention; but at the same time, the impression made is not only deep and lasting, but also sure and genuine: let us resort to an illustration. Suppose a figure, an image for instance, put into our hands, not entire, but in separate pieces, which are adjusted wisely to each other; when, after many trials and much study, we had put this together, should we not have a much more distinct and correct notion of it, than if we had examined it ever so long entire? We now know clearly the relations of the different parts, with their proper proportions, so clearly, that were a fragment presented to us, as belonging to the figure, we could satisfy ourselves whether it did really so or not, and our memory retain steadily, and to our great satisfaction, that which our own labour has put together. Such is the result of having studied so as to make our own arrangement of the miscellaneous detail of Scripture. Having put all its separate parts together in our minds, its doctrines in our understanding, its feelings

in our hearts, and thus spiritually framed in our breasts its entire configuration, we keep it by us permanently; and are, moreover, enabled at any moment to reject such false doctrine as the interested cunning of man may seek to impose upon us. We see at once its discrepancy; we know that there is no part to which it can be adapted. We will not argue on the doctrine itself, whether reasonable or otherwise; but we see that it is incongruous with the whole, and that is sufficient for its rejection. But supposing that what we have thus rejected, be proposed to one who has not thus studied Scripture for himself, but depends upon the aid of a system of divinity, well and clearly drawn out,—will he have the same ready discernment? He will not at the very outset, in all probability, have studied the system itself sufficiently; made out as it is to his hands, he will rely upon being able to lay his finger upon any part, when occasion calls, and not have the whole in his mind. In any case, he will not have the due comprehension of the bearing of the different parts to the one and only true shape; nor will the figure be filled up in all its parts, and unalterably fixed, but will flicker in his mind. Thus it will admit of incongruous additions, there is room for preposterous impertinences to intrude, and his faith is in jeopardy every hour. Under these circumstances, able and even

honest men may be entangled in the subtleties of wily arguers, and receive for true what has been made to have to them the semblance of truth. But with the proper study of the original, men, unlearned in all other respects, may attain a stability of faith which shall be proof to any shock from false brethren without. So harmonious are the various relations of Scripture, so accordant with all his purest notions; so come in aid of all his serious wants, so adapt themselves to every turn of his mind, to every point of his understanding; so apply to all the affairs of life, that he has the firmest, the most unshaken conviction of its truth. It has completely adapted itself to his mind, become one with it, and partakes, therefore, of the certainty of its existence. No subtleties suggested by unbelievers will move him. As well may they propound to him Berkeley's objections to the existence of matter. Nor will he be less safe from the impositions of false teachers, whose doctrines he will quickly discern to be at variance with the truth. To the learned, who has to pursue the history of the Church of Christ after the apostolic period, it is absolutely necessary to have arrived thus at a decisive state of religious opinion, in order that he may discern whether what he reads is traceable to Scripture, whether they deform the original, or conform

to it. This being the nature of the Holy Volume, it is plain that it requires qualities in its student in a higher degree than that in which they are commonly exercised upon other books. It must be read with more than common candour and sincerity, with more than common attention, with more than common perseverance.

We all know how a perverted mind distorts every thing to its own views in the perusal of writings, especially in such as are of a moral and historical cast. By a misrepresentation of some particulars, and a wilful slurring over of others, out of any complex question or body of facts, it can re-model the whole in satisfactory unison with its most corrupt inclinations. Now Scripture is both a moral (taking the word in its widest sense) and historical book, and the facilities of perversion are very much increased, by the very circumstance which we have seen to be so favourable to ingenuous minds, namely its arrangement. This is not that regular and closely woven chain which binds the reader to follow every step, examine every point, resisting by its systematic connection every attempt to omit or displace any link. But, in addition, the corrupt bosom is sure to carry into the perusal the most hearty good will to pervert. For the real views which the book exhibits are so humbling to human pride, so full of menace and

stern rebuke to the darling propensities of fallen man, and unfold such awful views of present responsibility and future judgment, that our corrupt nature gladly lays hold of any means of turning aside from so uninviting a contemplation. In deducing, therefore, its doctrines, such a bosom will select or omit such quantity and quality of detail as best suits its own previous views. Is not the history of the Church of Christ full of examples of this abuse of Scripture, and see we not the most determined self-accommodation in those who, in our days, denying our Lord's atonement, conduct their controversy with a perversion and disingenuousness incredible to those who have not witnessed it? But, perhaps, on a strict self-examination, we may find something of this in our own selves; and our own consciousness, combining with the memory of past experience, will suggest but too many of those shades of corrupt feeling which intervene between the first timid flutter of stricken conscience or wounded vanity, which would fain, but dares not, turn aside from some mortifying conclusion; and the proud defiance which shuts the volume at once, as speaking the language of a reproachful enemy.

A frank and ingenuous mind alone would profit of old from the preaching of our Saviour and his Apostles; and the same is equally required for the

profitable perusal of what they have left in writing. We must approach this volume, as we would the ark of God, with a profound reverence, with a wholesome fear of violating its purity, and with an offering of our whole heart, laying it open before him to his searching light in all its deepest recesses, without the reserve of a single nook, or the subterfuge of a single turning. Thus seeking in all humility the knowledge of his will, and not the confirmation of our own, we shall obtain the blessed guidance of the Holy Spirit, who will at once purify our bosom, and enlighten our understanding.

The very nature of this book, we have seen, forbids any correct information to be derived from such a perusal as is given to other books; a slight reading will neither dissipate previously entertained errors, nor attain to any sound doctrine, but on the contrary is likely to add but error to error. We are sufficiently fortunate in such a case, if we are supplied with a bare historical belief of the facts of Scripture. But never can we arrive at the deep and lively impressions of the heart, the holy temperament of the feelings, the linking of the thoughts in one bond, the direction of them to one object, the steadiness of view which can behold the light without a mote in the eye, or a cloud in the air,—in a word, a firmly rooted faith. This is the reward

of far superior exertions, the effect of an union of heart and understanding in the same cause, which can be attained by unwearied diligence only, exerted in putting together again and again, and weighing in all its bearings the detail of Holy Writ.

But it must be pursued also with more than common perseverance. In the perusal of other books we may often arrive at their conclusion with our reasoning advanced, and imagination excited beyond the point at which the author has paused. And in every case, so circumscribed is the mind of man, a definite number of perusals is sufficient to give us full possession of all which the author himself really understood. But Scripture presents us with a portion of the mind of God, and who hath ever known that, or been his counsellor? Or who shall set limits to it, and think that it shall be comprehended in the limited mind of man? The least particle of revelation from God, in intimate connexion as it is with all above and below, past and future, is sufficient for ever to task the human faculties. Were, therefore, life protracted to a period ever so long, the more he studied, the more also would the student find to demand his study still. The heart needs a continual renewal of healthy affections, by feeding upon the sense of God's will; the understanding

to be brought, from continual deviation, into adjustment with the standard of divine truth; and as page is turned over day after day, fresh passages are starting into importance, while others, which appeared detached, are forming clusters in his mind; and in every direction views are expanding, difficulties clearing up, deeper and more lasting impressions are forming. Who, for instance, will say that his understanding ever arrived at an unbroken view, even within its reasonable limits, in the Epistle to the Romans? Who, that his heart ever satisfied itself with reaching the depth of feeling expressed in St. Paul's farewell address to the Church of Ephesus,—how much less in those passages in which he accompanies the Saviour of the world to the cross? Who, that he ever satisfied either heart or understanding, in the crowded magnificence and awakening conclusions of the Epistle to the Hebrews? The book which tells of the future life, may indeed well demand for its comprehension all the employment of this, and the word of God for ever invite the highest exertion of the faculties of man.

With these qualifications then of more than common sincerity, attention, and perseverance, the student must approach the holy volume. The grand requisite implied in them all is an habitual

and patient examination of detail, an habitual and careful study of facts, which must be the more numerous and the more established, in proportion to the extent and weight of the superstructure.

Unfortunately this requisite is less common than it was. It is the fault of our stage of society. Our predecessors have left us so many aids in every department of knowledge, so furnished us every where with ready-made collections of facts, with ready-drawn outlines and systems, that he must have a mind far more independent and original than his fellows, who will forego all these advantages, and seek for himself; who will despise the vanity and low ambition which can make an ostentatious display of knowledge acquired at second hand, and can exult in the borrowed plumage of far nobler minds; who will enter with the undaunted spirit of the champion into all the dust and tumult of the arena, and grapple hand to hand with detail; who, amid a multitude of facts, will form his own combinations, create his own shapes, cut out through the perplexing wilderness his own views, and disdain to rest content with what are termed general views,—those ordinary tracks through the field of knowledge, which have been trodden bare by twice ten thousand minds before.

To the formation of a character so requisite, there

are many obstacles opposed, and by far the most serious, we see, are those which spring up in the very field of knowledge itself. The deceitfulness of the ground, indeed, is proverbial, and the more we become acquainted with it, the more we perceive the necessity of keeping a guard upon every step. Yet it is daily entered without the least foresight or precaution, as if there were a single spot in the regions of body or mind which the great adversary had not beset with his stumbling-blocks.

One character ill-suited for this study, is he who has been allured to the wide field of general knowledge, which is spread before him in such imposing extent and pleasing variety. The allurement having been his own gratification, whether of indolent amusement or of selfish vanity, he enters it under a baneful influence; for in every pursuit it is the object which gives it its character, and rewards it with a blessing or a curse. Such a person, therefore, flies from pursuit to pursuit, as the drone from flower to flower, without gathering honey. In course of time, his mind, habituated everywhere, from want of leisurely investigation, to gratuitous assumption, grows insensible to the force of proof: by neglecting the proper means of forming its own views, and passively borrowing those of others, its independence is broken, its stability destroyed, its native vigour and straight

forward ingenuity is lost. Loose and desultory habits come in the place of single-minded persevering industry; judgment is perverted, perception confused, memory ill arranged and treacherous; and an overweening vanity which mistakes for talent its slavish docility, which decries as the food of plodding dulness, that detail which itself has neither sincerity to appreciate, nor powers of attention to master, nor vigour of faculties to digest,—this fills up the measure of the curse of barrenness, with which God ever visits the abuse of his gifts. What then has such a person to do with a book demanding such large endowments of qualities which he possesses not, and the spirit of which, above all, recoils from the unholy apprehension of falsehood and vanity; breathing, as it does, meekness and lowliness, gentleness and unwearied patience, from every page?

Ill-suited, likewise, is another character, in many respects opposed to the last. He who has hung over the treasures of ancient literature with that exclusive attention, that he has imbibed its proud and intolerant spirit, so that every other literature appears rude and barbarous, and, above all, that book whose spirit throughout is opposed both to the style of his favourite poets, the maxims of his favourite philosophers, the characters of his favourite worthies. Hence is that book but too frequently overlooked by

men who have devoted their time and talents to this department of learning. And even when it is taken up, the profit is often far less to such persons than to other men. From having contracted their field of view, and neglected the healthy supplies to the mind from the world without, and also from the licence of conjecture indulged in such a study, these men are apt to carry to the Holy Volume a spirit little agreeable to it. They have not sufficient reverence for its authority, they are arbitrary both in the reception of the text, and in their interpretation of it; and are, above all men, liable to the disease of an irregulated imagination. Nothing, indeed, can be more arbitrary in its choice than this, and nothing more exclusive when it has chosen. If it will fix upon the brilliant and vast for the room which it gives to its extravagance, it will also choose the trifling for the indulgence of the pride of creation; for there it experiences the consciousness of its own powers displayed in the magnitude to which, by the gorgeous dress laid on, it has swollen an object so insignificant. All between, which includes the golden mean of calm and sober dignity, is overlooked and despised. It comes, therefore, but ill prepared to the simple language, the sober dignity, and unaffected good sense of the Holy Text. By capriciously laying undue stress on particular points of the detail,

and not giving every part its due weight, so that all shall be in harmonious equipoise, it forms a tottering edifice of belief, of discordant parts and proportions, and distorted in a multitude of ways from the features of stable grandeur, exhibited by the glorious original, the spiritual Temple of God.

A third character also ill-qualified to approach the Holy Volume, with the due correctness and proper information, is he who has never extended his serious pursuit of knowledge beyond the boundaries of the exact sciences. He is too apt to confound the nature of moral and abstract truth, which in this instance are particularly opposed; in the latter case a general truth having been discovered, all the detail included under is also in our power whenever we choose to apply it; the proposition, retained in memory, involves all that it did when first discerned; it loses nothing of force, and lies ever ready for immediate application in all its original extent. In the former case all this is reversed: in order to obtain the general truth we must have mastered the detail of which it is the result, and so far from the recollection of the general truth giving us the means of working out at any time the detail, its impression on the mind will be correct only in proportion to the quantity of detail retained with it, and to the freshness with which each particular is remembered.

profitable perusal of what they have left in writing. We must approach this volume, as we would the ark of God, with a profound reverence, with a wholesome fear of violating its purity, and with an offering of our whole heart, laying it open before him to his searching light in all its deepest recesses, without the reserve of a single nook, or the subterfuge of a single turning. Thus seeking in all humility the knowledge of his will, and not the confirmation of our own, we shall obtain the blessed guidance of the Holy Spirit, who will at once purify our bosom, and enlighten our understanding.

The very nature of this book, we have seen, forbids any correct information to be derived from such a perusal as is given to other books; a slight reading will neither dissipate previously entertained errors, nor attain to any sound doctrine, but on the contrary is likely to add but error to error. We are sufficiently fortunate in such a case, if we are supplied with a bare historical belief of the facts of Scripture. But never can we arrive at the deep and lively impressions of the heart, the holy temperament of the feelings, the linking of the thoughts in one bond, the direction of them to one object, the steadiness of view which can behold the light without a mote in the eye, or a cloud in the air,—in a word, a firmly rooted faith. This is the reward

of far superior exertions, the effect of an union of heart and understanding in the same cause, which can be attained by unwearied diligence only, exerted in putting together again and again, and weighing in all its bearings the detail of Holy Writ.

But it must be pursued also with more than common perseverance. In the perusal of other books we may often arrive at their conclusion with our reasoning advanced, and imagination excited beyond the point at which the author has paused. And in every case, so circumscribed is the mind of man, a definite number of perusals is sufficient to give us full possession of all which the author himself really understood. But Scripture presents us with a portion of the mind of God, and who hath ever known that, or been his counsellor? Or who shall set limits to it, and think that it shall be comprehended in the limited mind of man? The least particle of revelation from God, in intimate connexion as it is with all above and below, past and future, is sufficient for ever to task the human faculties. Were, therefore, life protracted to a period ever so long, the more he studied, the more also would the student find to demand his study still. The heart needs a continual renewal of healthy affections, by feeding upon the sense of God's will; the understanding

like the child who presses his closed eyes, in the brilliant and gorgeous hues of the imagination; they must have felt the power of philosophical generalisation. Happy they! if they shall have been enabled to keep down each element in due and healthful subordination.

These cases are sufficient for the point in hand, which was to shew the more prominent obstacles which the pursuit itself of knowledge throws in the way of the study of Scripture, rendering more rare than perhaps is generally thought, and certainly than could be desired, the character which was laid down for its earnest and improving student.

But it would be strange indeed if the cultivated mind were not exposed to increased difficulties and obnoxious to greater perils; the extension of any sphere of good is (alas! for our corrupt nature) necessarily that also of the evil with which it is so intimately mixed up; and the Giver of all good things, as he bestows not his gifts in vain, would depart from his established economy of the world, if he did not accompany them with corresponding trials to call forth and perfect their due exercise; therefore the cultivated mind dwells in the midst of perils, and, like the intruder into power, cannot remain with impunity where it is. It must neither tarry nor sleep: conspiracies of the powers of dark-

ness are around it, which, as they grow more threatening, it must surmount by going on to greater and still greater power, until it attain that sovereign unassailable power which is conferred by the knowledge of the word of God. There alone is its resting-place, there alone its throne, whence it can behold its enemies in subjection beneath its footstool.

A sovereign power indeed, is that knowledge to which all other knowledge must administer but as a loyal subject; for all other, however brilliant in appearance, however vast in extent, however useful in means, yet, if it be independent of this, terminates but in the mortal body. This is the fountain of honour to them all; yet (such is the perversity of human nature) as God is forgotten for his angels and saints by the weak and superstitious, so is this forgotten for its servants by the wise of this world.

Great, overpoweringly great, is the responsibility of those to whom God hath assigned the blessed gifts of talents to learn, and of leisure and opportunity of learning. The aid which they can bring to the cause of religious truth is manifest, but the harm which their apathy (to say nothing of their opposition) can effect is too little considered; here, indeed, our Lord may more especially exclaim, "Who is not with me is against me." On the unthinking, and on such as are guided by the examples around them,

(and how large a portion of society is this,) is it necessary to state the effect of indifference to God's word, shewn by men looked up to for power of talent and extent of information? When they see that all the treasures of knowledge have been ransacked but this, see all subjects eagerly discussed but this, find all books painfully marked and noted but this; can they do otherwise than learn to treat this volume with disrespect,—to reckon it dull and uninviting, mean and homely, a book for the vulgar? But even such treatment is less injurious, such silence less pernicious, than the levity of discussion with which it is sometimes entertained by persons of reputation for human wisdom. Unwilling, in their ostentatious display, and pretension to all knowledge, to appear quite ignorant of this, they will subject it to the same superficial means of acquirement, and with the same careless levity as they treat the ephemeral productions of the day, which serve for subjects of conversation. Hence its awful truths are discussed with a licentious laxity of opinion, the debaters seeking effect, and not conviction, and putting together in wrong, if not paradoxical and fantastic combinations, such detached passages as happen, amid their careless hearing or reading of the word, to have solicited and remained upon their memory. The opinions of such men on religion, worthless (to say

the least) as they are, unfortunately exercise much influence on that large class which look up to men of literary character as to infallible guides in every department. It were better for such to hold their tongue for ever upon this awful subject, than to rush into it without a knowledge conscientiously sought, and therefore correctly attained.

Some scholars, some men of character for all the attainments of human knowledge, embraced the faith of Jesus even in the earlier days of the gospel. Such was probably Dionysius the Areopagite, and such certainly was Justin Martyr. Let us, who have revelled, as they also had done, on the feast of literature, consider the frame of mind which led them in the end to make the inestimable preference of the word of God. Their faculties had not been abused and dissipated by frivolous and heartless pursuit of superficial knowledge; they had not been dulled by indolence of light reading, nor perverted by vanity, but had been maintained in all liveliness of health and vigour, so that the mind, having its natural sway, should pursue its legitimate objects. It must have had quick all its native curiosity, all its candour, its love of truth, all its energy of pursuit, all its singleness of view. Such qualities (and let us ever bear this in mind) it must have brought to that investigation, which God has ordained to be its noblest

exercise, the investigation of his attributes; and to this end also it must have habitually practised temperance, to keep itself in vigour; prudence, to direct its exertions by the shortest and surest way; fortitude, to keep its own unswerving course, undiverted by the authority of names; adding to them all, patience to endure, perseverance to pursue, hope to attain. To such a mind spoke St. Paul at Athens, and beyond all our powers of conception must have been the effect. Let us imagine a treasure long sought, under a hope, indeed, but not assurance, of its existence, to be at last found; a grief long suffered to be turned into joy; darkness long and thick to be suddenly changed into uninterrupted light; life to be given for death. So came upon these primitive scholars the tidings of salvation in Christ Jesus. And shall not we, their successors in both fields of knowledge; we, in whom the order has been reversed, who knew the sound of the word of God long before the dictates of the philosopher, or the tale of the poet; who never knew what real darkness was, any more than he who at will retires for a short time into a cavern from the rays of the sun, in order to enjoy them again in greater effect of warmth and brilliancy,—shall not we maintain with equal sense of its value, with equal joy and satifaction, the inestimable gift? Shall not we, who all our life

long, both in ourselves and in others, have been experiencing its blessed effects, maintain our profession as zealously as they chose it? O what a state of condemnation would ours be, if, in contrast to those learned men of old who changed the philosopher for the Christian, we should exchange the Christian for the philosopher. God forbid such a termination. Let us diligently provide against the slightest probability of it.

A tendency to this result belongs to mature age. But there are many here present who have still the great part of their course before them. They are at that period of life, when it is enjoyed to all its measure of fulness; when the experience is common of those blissful moments, in which, from health of body and lightness of heart, the bare animal existence is felt as an inestimable blessing. What feelings then, let me ask of them, can they conceive as attending the consciousness of existence of a mind fresh in spiritual health, and full of the glad assurance of immortality? How joyous, how divine! Such a sense is conferred by the word of God: thus its knowledge bestows the blissful feelings of eternal youth upon the mind. Let the recurrence and the remembrance of such moments serve to bring the analogy to view, and accustom them to appreciate the exceeding value of this heavenly gift. This

(let them bear ever in mind) is the one thing, without which all knowledge at the best is useless, and may be most pernicious. For knowledge, though indeed a glorious, a powerful instrument, yet like all mere human acquisitions, is in itself but a brute weapon, depending, for its effect of good or evil, upon the mind of the employer, and may be used in felling God's cedars on Libanus, when it should be hewing down the groves of Baal.

Let them then, remembering their Creator in the days of their youth, dedicate to the study of his life-giving word the freshness of the morning of their days: even now, in this their day, while the heart is yet plastic and unperverted, still in healthy communion with the head; while the mental vision is yet clear; while the power of observation is yet fresh and keen of edge,—of attention yet undistracted, of memory yet retentive. On the suitable employment of these mental gifts, depends not only their native health and masculine vigour of mind, but the power of appreciating divine truth is concerned, the welfare of their immortal souls is at stake. Let them therefore, together with the blessing, consider the responsibility also of the gift which God has conferred upon them in a liberal education; and as they gaze upon the wide and spirit-stirring prospect which he has thus unveiled to them, and feel

the firmness of grasp, and the extent of power, with which he has thus endowed their understanding, let them resolve to render unto him who gave, the first-fruits of their harvest. With the Word of God let them begin, and with the full blessing of the Word of God they shall end. The right understanding, the unreserved acceptance of this, let them ever keep in view; and, looking steadfastly to the end, cheerfully enter upon the labour of detail, accustoming their minds, in all conscientiousness, to that patience which alone can produce a perfect work, or attain a precious object. For without the substantial support of a full body of well-canvassed facts, reason will decline into barren speculation, imagination will degenerate into idle dreaming. Let theirs be the patience of that wise king of yore, who built the temple of the living God; and, laying fact upon fact, as it were stone upon stone, let them, like good spiritual masons, gradually raise and combine their views, until all shall grow in harmonious proportions of strength and beauty into a goodly temple, aptly fitted together. In such a temple only of the mind will scriptural truth deign to dwell; and it will dwell, and fill the whole house with the glory of the Lord.

# SERMON VI.

## ON SACRIFICE.

JOHN I. 29.

*The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.*

IT is difficult to conceive how any one, who believes in the atonement of our blessed Saviour, can consider sacrifice to be of any other than divine institution: the Jewish sacrifices, and more especially that of the Lamb, are continually appealed to in the New Testament as foreshadowing the offering of his body upon the cross. But these are but the continuation, under certain qualifications, of a rite which can be traced up to the immediate sons of Adam. Now had it been the invention of Adam or of these his sons, and had so spread through all their descendants, as to become an universal means of worshipping God,—which last we know to have been the fact,—would God, when he took so much pains to separate the children of Israel from the rest of the

world, and keep them far away from the abominations of the Heathen, have maintained among them a rite which, beyond every other, was universally held with the grossest notions, and practised with the vilest abominations? Would he, had it contained nothing more than what the carnal mind of man could impart to it, have suffered among his chosen people this stepping-stone to the horrible depravities and uncleanness of the sacrificers to Moloch, and to Baal? Would he have taken out of the hands of man a rite which his creature had invented under gross conceptions, (for bloodshedding, as conceived by himself, could not be otherwise,) and abused to his deepest moral degradation;—would he have adopted this as the vehicle and type of the greatest and purest of moral blessings, even of the atonement of his only begotten son?—or viewing it even in the highest light which it will thus bear, namely, as an act of will-worship of the first man, conceived in his purest thoughts; is it consonant with due notions of the Almighty to suppose that God, by a second thought as it were, imparted to this act a meaning which he himself had previously revealed, but without making any provision for thus embodying and continuing it? It must be some strong prejudice indeed which should make us espouse a supposition clogged with such difficulties, and reject one which immediately

brings all into harmony. But if we proceed in our examination, we shall see that such a means of worshipping God never could of itself have entered into the minds of the persons, who are represented having first employed it.

The occasions on which man approaches God, may be reduced to two:—he comes before him, with his offering, either to thank him for past mercies and to implore their continuance, or to ask pardon for past offences, and deprecate punishment. But however we may in thought separate these occasions, yet, in the worship of a fallen creature like man, they must ever be combined; the offering, therefore, which he brings must be considered in the twofold light of a gift, and a ransom: of a gift, as the natural expression of thanksgiving and homage to him who gave, and can give more, who is the ruler and maker of all things: of a ransom, to him to whom his life hath been forfeited by transgression, to him whose holy nature cannot endure the least unholiness, and who can take away no less than give. Considering it then as a gift, we find it hard to reconcile this meaning with the very inadequate notions which the first sacrificer (who could not be later than Cain or Abel) must necessarily have had, both with regard to its nature and efficacy; such a meaning surely supposes a stage of society much advanced beyond his. Let

this point, however, be granted; we have next to ask how he could conceive a slaughtered beast to be a gift?—to us, habituated to animal food, the idea is not so incongruous. But how could men not allowed the use of such food, thus conceive of it? How could Noah, (to come lower down still,) who offered his sacrifice upon his deliverance, imagine that he was thus presenting a gift? How, when death was an idea so exceedingly abhorrent to the mind of the first sacrificer, could he dare in the very first instance to put an animal to death; much more to present it as an acceptable gift to a being of those attributes which his yet unadulterated creed acknowledged? The same objections are fatal to its being considered as a ransom; and to these we may add the impossibility of supposing that a man's reason could induce him to conceive that the life of another could be any substitute for his own, except by express compact between the parties offending and offended; still less could it go a step farther, and make the life of an irrational animal that substitute.

But if we suppose him to have sacrificed on the express injunction of God, every thing is clear. Humbly acknowledging that he had forfeited life and light by his transgression, deeply thankful for God's merciful pardon, he would joyfully accept (although he could not of himself have devised)

this lively mode of expressing both his confession and thanksgiving—the more lively from its repugnance to law and feeling; and when once revealed, sacrifice so adapts itself to every turn of man's feelings towards a superior being, that it would survive the wreck of every other portion of God's church. For since the notions formed of God by impure and gross minds, are also gross and impure, the offering of blood and of meats would be a suitable expression of their homage or deprecation to the lustful, capricious, and cruel beings, whom their corrupt imaginations had set upon the throne of heaven. Thus it would be maintained (though under a very different view) no less by the apostate than by the believer, by the Heathen than by the Jew. And its universal prevalence, proves no more, than that it is one of those instances where man can turn to the account of his own corrupt passions the will of God, as declared by his revealed word, no less than as expressed by the voice of nature.

We conclude, therefore, that this prominent feature in God's church, was expressly ordained by him, who designed from the first to sum up all in Christ (EPHES. i. 10), both in heaven and in earth, and that any other account of its origin is equally inconsistent with the original notions of man, and with the harmony of divine revelation.

Hence, sacrifice embodied to man the circumstances of God's first intervention with him after he had sinned; it was both a history and a prophecy; it carried him back to a lively view of his fall and condemnation to death; it carried him forward to a bright prospect of his redemption, both being figured to him by the death of the beast, which was slaughtered before his eyes, and was accepted by God as an offering; and thus all its applications to outward circumstances, throughout all ages of the church, are referable to two heads. It is on the part of man, the offerer, either a confession of sin, or an oblation of thanksgiving: it is on the part of God, the acceptor, a correspondent remission of the sin, or an acceptance of the offering, implying a continuance or furtherance of blessings. And as prophecy, in reaching to its grand and final object, becomes applicable upon its way to many subordinate objects, so sacrifice (which is indeed a species of prophecy) is applicable to all circumstances which are subordinate to, and contained in, the one great deliverance from everlasting perdition. Accordingly we find, both in the Patriarchal and Jewish Church, sacrifices of propitiation both for moral and bodily impurities, and sacrifices of thanksgiving for any great success or signal deliverance; so Job sacrificed for his sons lest they should have thought evil in their hearts;

so Noah sacrificed on his deliverance from the flood. To a mind, steadfast in holy hope, every chance and change of life will serve to bring the great end in view; and sacrifice, therefore, will convey the expression of its feelings, be they of abasement or exultation, whether it acknowledge its worthiness of condemnation, or its unworthiness of redemption.

The occasional sacrifices mentioned in the Old Testament, mostly concern, as would be likely from the recorded events which called them forth, the whole Church of God. Such is the sacrifice of Abel, who, although dead, yet speaketh: such is that of Noah, when he re-built the Church of God after the flood: such is that of Solomon, when he dedicated the Temple of God. And since sacrifice was also the covenanted channel of communication between God and man, we find that some particular sacrifice forms the link between the successive stages of the church. The offering of Isaac, upon which God promised Abraham a posterity numerous as the stars in heaven or sand on the sea shore, and that in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed, connects immediately the Patriarchal with the Jewish Church, and draws cords of relation to the Christian. A particular celebration of the Jewish Passover, connects the Jewish with the Christian: for at this our Lord not only instituted the sacrament of his body

and blood, which should supersede that Jewish rite, but also, yielding up his breath at the very hour of evening sacrifice, combined the type and the reality, the shadow and the substance, the former and the latter days.

We have said that sacrifice was prophecy in a bodily shape: it follows also the same law of expanding clearness of meaning, by means of narrowing limitation of application, which we saw was observed by the other, in passing through the Jewish dispensation. As a national offering, it was limited to a number of particular cases, each sending forth from many mouths a loud prophetic voice, as the stated daily sacrifice, the Feast of the Passover, the day of atonement. As a private offering it met a number of stated cases of impurity, which, going to the very bodily condition of the person, even to the meats which he ate, reminded the Jew of his natural unholiness, his conventional holiness. Thus restored to purity, he typified bodily the spiritual elect of God, of whom his Son should in the latter days compose his church, having made them clean by the sacrifice of his own body; and assuredly this solemn and striking rite, being thrust upon his continual attention, must have prepared the serious thinker to look beyond the letter, and seek for the spirit. It became also still more pointed to its object, by being con-

fined to the tabernacle, and by the varying place of that tabernacle being at last fixed at Jerusalem, after the temple had been built. And just as the promise of the Redeemer was gradually narrowed from the whole family of mankind, from the seed of Abraham, from that of Isaac, from that of Jacob, from the tribe of Judah down to the house of David; so, in this analogous rite, his representative, the High Priest, was gradually taken from a narrower range,—from the first-born of mankind, from the nation of the Jews, from the tribe of Levi, from the family of Aaron. Thus significantly converging through successive stages from many quarters to one end, sacrifice, receiving its substance in the death of our Redeemer, closed for ever its shadowy representations.

But as prophecy, though it received its grand fulfilment as far as man looked for, in the coming of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, and had become history, yet took up a new strain at this point, and turned all eyes towards his second coming in glory to judge both the quick and the dead, as the end of all things: so sacrifice, although it received its full accomplishment in the death of our Redeemer, by whom it was once offered for the sins of the whole world, past, present, and to come, and therefore, as a rite, is virtually extinct; yet has had its place supplied in

God's church by an ordinance, which is both historically commemorative, and at the same time prophetically assuring. This is the sacrament of the Lord's supper, in which we not only commemorate his death and passion, but also look forward to his coming again. And although it be, as we have said, no real sacrifice, yet, inasmuch as it is commemorative, and therefore symbolical, of the great sacrifice, inasmuch as the sign is often called by the name of the thing signified, inasmuch as its included offerings of prayer, of repentance, of thanksgiving, of charity, are each of them figuratively designated by this title in Scripture, we may in common language (which is never peculiarly strict) join with the ancient church in calling it by a term, which brings at once so many of its relations to view. On this principle we will now proceed to consider it, ever keeping a watchful eye upon its predecessor.

First of all, the hideous and appalling representation of death, exhibited to our predecessors in the bleeding, groaning, and struggling victim, has been removed from our eyes. Several reasons concur for this, all arising out of the fulfilment of the type. For instance;—the Patriarch and the Jew looked forward to an obscure future; the prospect of their deliverance was dim and distant. They required, therefore, a lively representation to bring it near to their minds;

and as the ceremony was prophetic, it was necessary that it should, at the moment of fulfilment, confirm the truth, by the most startling coincidence of the figure with the reality. But to us, living after the fulfilment, and therefore looking back to one of the clearest and most carefully detailed facts of history, a resemblance so close were unnecessary. It would indeed be more than unnecessary; it would be inexpedient. For the ceremony, by going so far into reality as actual death, would be too strong an expression of a fact, of which we can form a very lively conception already, and a far more accurate, also, than any which could be suggested by any sensible object. Hence we could not but be struck by some disagreement between the sign and thing signified. At the same time, by going no further than death, it were mutilated and incomplete: it would tell us but half the truth, shewing, indeed, the death for our sins, but not the resurrection for our justification. For us, therefore, it is not only sufficient, but even expedient, that the signs employed in our commemorative rite should be as slight as the mind's ordinary powers can allow, and more especially when these signs have been instituted by the great Offerer himself; since the very circumstance of institution necessarily fixes our attention upon the event commemorated; therefore the mere pouring out of

wine and breaking of bread, coupled with his charge to continue this commemoration until his coming again, are sufficient to lead our minds to the crucifixion of his body, the shedding of his blood, and his second coming in glory to judge both the quick and the dead. But the most important reason of all is the nature of the gospel of Christ. It is the proclamation of pardon to all mankind,—it is the declaration of the perfect love of God,—it is the certification of his wrath appeased, and of his justice satisfied; it is the announcement of the victory over death, and of the life everlasting. Aptly, therefore, in this rite, has the harsh threat and open rebuke of death (which daily humbled the Patriarch and the Jew), been removed from the eyes of the celebrator. For a frightful scene of gasps, and groans, and bubbling blood, has been substituted a picture of overpowering love — a representation of the last supper of our Lord; meat and drink, emblems of life and joy, are set before us, and both signify and convey to us the nourishment of everlasting life, which we have in his body and blood: meat and drink, not supplied from slaughtered fellow-creatures, but being the untortured products of the earth. Thus the very nature of the elements which show our Lord's death, conveys the assurance of the abolition of death to ourselves.

Secondly: We saw that sacrifice carried the mind of the offerer both backward and forward: backward, by the death of the victim, to the sentence of death at the fall; forward, by God's acceptance of this substitute, to his restoration. Alas! through what a long and dreary interval did his eye move to reach this last bright object! How weary and sickened did his heart arrive at this resting place! and after all how faint was that brightness, how unstable that resting-place, compared with ours. Our rite, too, is both retrospective and prospective. But what is our retrospect? not our fall, but our redemption. And what is our prospect? not our redemption, but our exaltation to life and light everlasting, at the second coming of our great God and Saviour. We begin with historical certainty of fact, where he ended in prophetic hope: we end with the complete and glorious reversal of the condition of misery and degradation, with which he began. Thus we have a bright and burning light at each extreme of view, and all between is full of joy, and peace, and comfort. "Oh Lord, our Governor! how excellent is thy name in all the world," exclaimed David, on considering the glory of the heavens: what words would he have found had he been admitted to this our spectacle, and gazed on the spiritual firmament which is expanded before our eyes!

Thirdly: On the same principle with sacrifice, this rite will be an especial vehicle of confession and of thanksgiving, on the occasion of the various incidents of life. These, be they to our pleasure or our pain, to our encouragement or chastisement, it is our duty to point to the great end of our being, to turn to the account of the life to come. If we suffer, let us take care so to suffer, as fellow-sufferers of Christ; if we be in joy, let us be mindful so to rejoice, as joint-heirs with him in bliss. In either case, this rite, setting forth our Lord's death and passsion, and also assuring us of his glorious coming again, will be in exact accord with our hearts, will give them proper vent and due expression, and with its refreshing benefits supply grace for grace; therefore, in all the grand interventions of life, hither let us resort,—here let us seek the Lord, and we shall find him. As surely as he performed his promise of meeting his disciples in Galilee, after his resurrection from death, so surely will he meet us here, and give the blessings of his spiritual presence. If God of old chose the hour of sacrifice of bulls and rams, in which to reveal himself, and made gracious promises to Abraham and Zachariah, will he leave this ordinance fruitless, in which we spiritually partake of the sacrifice of the body and blood of his only begotten Son? Therefore, let him who hath

fallen into sickness or trouble, hither repair, to make confession of his sins and acknowledge God's justice. He will not have come in vain; he shall have mercy for justice. Let him who hath risen from pain or sorrow, here confess himself less than the least of God's mercies, yield his entire thanks; neither shall he have come in vain: his hope and his joy shall be chastened into that hope and joy which can never fail. Let those who have lately joined their cares, their joys, their fortunes, their affections, here make their solemn homage and profession, as heads of a new household in the church of God; neither shall they have come in vain: God will give them grace to rear children of grace, and they shall be succeeded by heirs of promise.

Fourthly: Like sacrifice, and indeed every other ordinance of worship, this rite will be one of stated times and seasons. Now, if we be bound to repair to it whenever we can, under whatever circumstances of life, since all (we have seen) are peculiarly met with some appropriate blessing, how can we willingly absent ourselves on fixed occasions? Is it more difficult to prepare a due oblation of our hearts, because we have time at our command? Are we less peculiarly circumstanced for the reception of blessings in this sacrament, because we have leisure to review beforehand our whole condition, and thus

to find out its chief bearing? Does the general benefit of anticipation meet here with its single exception? are we less prepared when in the enjoyment of health of body and mind, and with days, and even weeks before us, than when surprised by sickness and dismay, and obliged desperately to snatch at opportunity, ere it be too late? "Three times a year shall thy males appear before me," said the Lord God to the Jews, in giving his ordinances of stern command from the blazing mount; and dispersed as they were, they gathered before him from every quarter of the earth. "Do this in remembrance of me," said our Divine Master to his church, in delivering his last charge of love at his last meal. What then? Are we less bounden than the Jew? need we pay less attention because our summons have come more in the form of a request than of a command; because our love is appealed to, and not our fear; because we are invited as men, and not compelled as children? True it is that the request of man may be neglected, because it commonly implies the want of means of enforcing his will. But the request of God is an expression of love, and not of weakness. It is a commandment, and the most fearful to the disobedient of all commandments; for it appeals not to our carnal man, not to our slavish fear, of pains and penalties: but

it is addressed to our spiritual man, to our love and eagerness of obedience, the fruits of that love. If therefore we hear not, where is our spiritual man? and then indeed, where, alas! are we?

This last analogy with sacrifice has now brought me to the practical consideration of this sacrament of God's church; with this I will proceed.

Very different indeed from the prevailing notions of the present day, were those which were entertained on this point by the earlier Christians. Let us for a moment suppose one of these hearers of the hearers of our Lord, or even of the hearers of the sixth or eighth succession from them, to arise and take his stand in a church of these times and of this land. Let us endeavour to conceive his feelings on seeing (as we repeatedly see) a whole congregation turn their backs upon the table of the Lord, and thus voluntarily put themselves into a situation, which with him was one of incapacity or degradation, reserved for children, for the unbaptized, for the lapsed, for the possessed: on hearing the solitary minister of that table call, with the voice of one crying in the wilderness, lost upon stocks and stones: would he deign to acknowledge for a portion of Christ's church, that crowd which he saw hurrying through the door, as if escaping from an unwelcome invitation? would he condescend to term that a

flock of Christ, which he saw refusing the food provided for them by their shepherd? He would indignantly deny all fellowship with them in Christ; he would assert that they had neither part nor portion with him,—that the memory of his mercies was unpleasing to them,—that they recked not of his body and his blood,—and careless of how he had come, were careless also of how he would come. Were we to ask him, in what company then would he place them, he would unhesitatingly answer, in the company of Peter, who denied his master; in the company of Judas, who quitted that very table to betray him. To any attempt at palliation, he would indignantly demand if we held that to forget God is not to have cast him out of mind,—to neglect his injunctions is not to rebel against him,—not to thank him for his blessings is not to slight them,—not to be with him is not to be against him,—not to gather is not to scatter? However reproachful this language may appear, no one, who is acquainted with the sentiments of the earlier ages, will assert that it is stronger than such as would rise to the lips, if not pass them, of such a spectator. Custom has reconciled us to the sight, and so it will to that of the most hideous deformities; they are not the less really hideous notwithstanding.

After this none will surely find fault with the

plain uncompromising language of our church, which so earnestly enjoins her members to repair to the celebration of this rite, and so solemnly warns them when they are come. She uses the language of Scripture, and such language will equally condemn us in carelessly approaching God with private prayer. There, however, neither she nor any other human agent can interfere. There we must be left to our own comfortable self-delusion, and no words from without can interrupt the pleasing dream that we are really praying, when we are neither penitent, nor thankful, nor obedient. But here, in a public ceremony, where her voice must needs be heard, she exhorts and she deprecates in the most earnest terms, and honestly opens the truth, however unpalatable. She is the most anxious and affectionate of mothers. Let us not then complain of her public severity, but rather embrace it as an occasion of enquiring into our private laxity. Let us not, by wilfully mistaking her affectionate exhortation for stern denunciation, be of that company, which, when our Saviour spoke of the eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood, cried out, "This is a hard saying: who can hear it?" and walked with him no more.

This rite, my brethren, is a spiritual sacrifice, in which we spiritually celebrate the great sacrifice of

our Saviour, once offered upon the cross; and entering into his sufferings unto death, which are our redemption unto life, we offer up ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto God. But men cry out here that they are not in a fit state to make use of such strong expressions, they cannot pledge themselves so far, their intentions cannot rise to a mark so high. Let them now consider, to what does all this really amount? Even to this, that their profession of Christianity is but that of the lips, that they will not form a single steady and sincere resolution, and so give God a single pledge that they will ever confess it in their hearts. Have they ever reflected that there is such a thing as apostacy, and no less amid the seductions of quiet luxurious times, than amid the compulsion of troublous and necessitous? Can they imagine, that either in one case or the other they can hold fast the faith of Christ, when they have taken no pains to acquire either knowledge or resolution which shall support them in the day of trial? For a real strife after such knowledge and resolution would of necessity bring them to the table of the Lord. But be the world how it will, full of joy or of sorrow, of seduction or of intimidation, the life of the Christian is a scene of continual trial, a long-protracted agony of conflict. Sacrifices are there to be daily offered by

him to his Saviour, of pleasure, of comfort, of riches, of power, of affection, of everything which the world holds precious. And will a single such sacrifice ever be offered by him who will not so much as engage in the shadowy representation of the great sacrifice? Will he ever suffer for Christ's sake, who will not even enter upon the bare commemoration of his sufferings? Will he ever take up, still more bear, the Cross of Christ, who turns away from his table? Here then, my brethren, is a most simple test, and at the same time most effectual. The time is indeed gone by, since this rite has been applied as a test of allegiance to an earthly sovereign. But it will ever remain a test of loyalty to our Heavenly Sovereign; and disaffection cannot but be most justly imputed to him who refuses to take it.

How blissfully, amid all the horrors of the wilderness, amid the conflict of surrounding enemies, could the eye and heart of the pious Israelite repose upon the cloudy pillar of glory, which rested upon the tabernacle. There was peace, there was security, which no power of this world could disturb. And although he knew that God was ever nigh unto all them that call upon him, and that no sensible representation could bring him nearer, yet this visible token of his presence, and sign of his covenant, could not but administer continual hope of comfort. And

are we, amid the perplexing wilderness of life, amid the weary struggle with foes of body and soul, are we left destitute of similar comfort? Oh no! the same Lord of glory, who exhibited that symbol of his helping presence to the Israelite, hath ordained a resting-place for our spiritual eye. He hath established among us a visible sign, and given us in this rite a palpable assurance, that if we suffer, then we suffer with him who rose again, and ascended to prepare mansions of bliss for his faithful followers; for if he show us his death, he also foreshows to us his coming again, when all enemies, with their great leaders, sin and death, shall be put under his footstool, and he shall receive his own into everlasting glory.

Come then, let us offer our sacrifice, and the greater our health and wealth, so much the more let us repair to its celebration: for we have both more to be thankful for, and all our affections and faculties are in their best vigour for God's service. Let us not wait for the desponding, the distracting, the misgiving hour of sickness; nor let the hour of death so surprise us, as but to leave time for our first and last celebration of the Lord's supper, as the only test which, after a life of so many opportunities, we can give of our profession. What were this but the delusion of him who deemed to save his

soul by securing his dying limbs in the dress of a monk? Let us then come to our Lord's table, and bring with us to it a thankful acknowledgment of the high and blessed privileges of light under which we are invited to it. Consider a moment, my brethren, and look at the patriarch: see with what a vague undefined prospect of the mode of his redemption, he brings his offering to the altar. Look at the Jew: behold, how, in despite of the light of his law playing around, of the blaze of prophecy streaming in advance, yet is in ignorance of the precise events by which his salvation shall be wrought, that he goes up to the altar. And now look at yourselves: with a clear knowledge of the manner of your redemption, of the character of your Redeemer, every object, every motion, every word in the rite before you, implying no obscure future, veiling no promised blessing, but referring you to past events distinctly and minutely made known to you, the blessed effects of which you are now experiencing in substance, not anticipating in hope; the whole scheme of man's restoration being drawn out and laid open before your eyes, your Saviour's express words inviting you;—thus, even thus do ye offer your reasonable, your bloodless sacrifice. Think of this, and compare your situation with that of the most enlightened and illustrious characters

under the old covenants. Yea, compare it with that of Noah, when he built anew the church of God, on the renewal of the world after the flood: with that of Abraham offering up his son in a type of that which was to come: with that of David, when he brought up the ark of God into its resting place: with that of Solomon, when he made his royal and costly offerings on the dedication of God's temple: with that of Isaiah, when at sacrifice he beheld the glory of the Lord: with that of Zachariah, when the archangel Gabriel promised a Son, the forerunner of the Redeemer: with that of Simeon, when he offered the sacrifice of the blessed Mary, and held up in his arms the Saviour of the world. All these obtained not the promise, and the least of us in the kingdom of God is greater than them all. They had but the faint glimmer of the broad daylight amidst which we are living. Let us think of these things, and, endeavouring duly to estimate this our peculiar blessedness, thankfully dispose our hearts, so to eat of the bread and drink of the cup (which are the body and blood of our Saviour) upon earth, that we may indeed drink of the fruit of the spiritual vine, and eat of the spiritual bread of everlasting life, together with him, new, in the kingdom of God.

# SERMON VII.

## ON THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

HEBREWS III. 1.

*Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.*

CHRIST, having been ordained for the salvation of mankind, and, in order to this end, having to reconcile by his mediation two separated parties, must have performed this office under a twofold character, by which he may present himself to either party on the part of the other,—to man on the part of God, to God on the part of man. In the first case, as sent from God, he would proclaim to man God's gracious intention, signify his gracious promise of pardon, and instruct him in the way of obtaining it. In the second case, he would appear before God with the means of satisfying his justice, and to present to him man's entire repentance, thanks, faith, homage, and submission. To the first of these his human nature was necessary, to the second his divine: the former is

the duty of his apostolical character, the latter of his pontifical. Now, since the proper scenes on which these two appear are earth and heaven, he must previously to his advent have discharged the former by deputation: and since man requires a sign to assure him of the discharge of the latter, hence in this also, a representative on earth will be required. We have now to look out for these representatives in the church of God.

Adam was evidently such a representative under both heads. As an offerer of sacrifice, he was the the pontifical; as an inspired instructor of his children, he was the apostolical representative. And the same combination will continue throughout this stage; since the joint offering of a family cannot be so properly offered by any member as by the father, its natural head; and he is already invested by nature with the apostolical office. But in that state of the world, families grew into tribes, and tribes into nations, and the head of the nation would necessarily combine these offices: hence we may also resolve them into three divisions. He would be priest, prophet, and king; according to the second and third offices, governing and teaching his people, and being the lineal conservator, if not the deliverer, of the oracles and promises of God. Such was Melchisedec.

We may here remark the exceedingly high privi-

leges of the first-born, who was the natural heir not only to temporal, but also to spiritual dignities; and may estimate the crime of Esau, who was heir not only to what had been transmitted to Adam, but also to additional promises made to his father, and his father's father.

On coming to the next dispensation, we immediately encounter its characteristic limitation. As the sacrifice is confined to one place, to certain times, to specified sins, so the sacrificer is limited to the first-born of a single family. We also meet with a disruption of the apostolical and pontifical offices, the first being conferred on Moses, the second on Aaron. This was necessary to the more full and perfect development of each during this stage of preparation and foreshadowing. There is also a difference in their transmission, the second being entailed on the first-born of Aaron's family, while the first is not confined either to person or family, but distributed among several at the same time, as between Saul the king, and Samuel the prophet; and indeed Solomon was the last in whom the dignity of rule and gift of prophecy was united. This difference of transmission arose not only from the circumstance of the second being merely passive representation, and therefore affording no reason for departing from the line of succession; and of the

first being most active exertion, and therefore requiring qualities which could be maintained in a limited succession only by a continual miracle; but it was designed also to narrow the view down to the one only mediator, who, when once come, could never again be represented by human creature; while in his apostolical character, our Lord continued and continues to be represented by a widely spread ministry, deriving commission from him through his Apostles. Amidst all his exclusiveness, however, and in the very pages of the book of that law of contraction and constraint, the Jew was warned of the shadowy nature of his priesthood, by the exhibition of that of Melchisedec, who there stands without enumeration of ancestors, so necessary to the genuineness of the Aaronic priest; without time of birth or time of death being stated; without predecessors or successors being specified: and the spiritually minded, no doubt, were instructed by this comparison to expect the passing away of their own priesthood, and look forward to one common to all mankind, and of everlasting duration.

But now those shadowy priests have all vanished, and their substance is come. The first-born among many brethren, the true priest, the true king, the true prophet has appeared, hath announced pardon from God, and hath offered the sacrifice ordained

from the beginning of the world. On earth, and for all men, and not in the temple and for the Jews, the great High Priest hath made his offering; and in heaven and for all men, and not in the holy of holies, and for the Jews, the great High Priest, in virtue of that offering, is standing with his intercession. There is, therefore, no longer upon earth a sacrificing priest; consequently it is only in his apostolical character that our Saviour can have any representative: generally speaking, he is represented by every one in the Christian church to whom we are bound to pay obedience or reverence, since, however nature may have invested them with claims to such, yet they derive a new and higher title from the great head and ruler of all. We must be faithful to our rulers, we must be obedient to our masters, attentive to our teachers, dutiful to our parents, for his sake by whom all these powers are ordained. But more particularly he is represented by the spiritual pastors of his church, whose office, since sacrifice has been finished, and the volume of prophecy sealed, is now confined to the spiritual government and instruction of his church; they form, therefore, a ministry, and not a priesthood: accordingly they are never once designated in the New Testament (however they may be in later writers,) by the word *(hiereys,)* which signifies a

sacrificing priest, but are termed bishops or overseers, presbyters or elders, deacons or ministers. The root of all corruption in the church, has been the blasphemous assumption of the sacrificial and mediatorial character by these representatives of but a portion of even the apostolical.

We will now proceed to examine our own dispensation under the two heads of its pontifical and apostolical government.

I. The first we have seen to belong to Christ alone; it has been partly fulfilled upon earth, and is still partly fulfilling in heaven. Let us consider our state in this respect, and compare it with that of the Jew, which was one of greater blessedness than that of the patriarch, inasmuch as a written and recorded warrant and promise of God was more satisfactory than one which was merely traditional, and therefore also not so expressly traced to God's command.

We have seen that Jewish intercession was confined, 1, to a certain place; 2, to a certain time; 3, to a certain person; 4, to certain sins.

1. The place was the Jewish temple, a building of stones and timber. Intercession, therefore, was subject to all the external accidents. A conflagration might put an end to it, nor could it be renewed after such an interruption, without fresh warrant from God. Thus the Jew was in spiritual jeopardy every

hour; he was indeed subject to wordly elements; every threat of the Syrian, the Babylonian, the Egyptian, or the Roman, made him tremble, not only for his temporal, but also spiritual welfare. And it required the uninterrupted and stirring song of prophecy to keep his heart above despair, and assure him against the threatening appearances around. Now turn from this bondage to our liberty. Our temple is heaven, there is our High Priest far beyond the reach of all the powers of earth or of hell; nay, keeping them in subjection under his feet. Nothing in this world, neither kingdoms, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things upon earth, nor things under the earth, can give us a moment's anxiety.

2. On incurring any sin or impurity for which his law had provided atonement by sacrifice, the Jew had all the formal, and (unless resident in Jerusalem) tedious and dilatory process to go through, of repairing in person to the temple, of instructing the priest with the occasion of his sacrifice, and then of the ceremonial of the sacrifice. Thus innumerable accidents may intervene to deprive him of restoration to his former state, and the whole nation might be deprived of its imputed character of holiness, be degraded from its glorious state of an assembly of priests and kings, by some worldly incident, pre-

venting the annual celebration of the great day of atonement; on which this nation of exclusive holiness and vaunted privileges was summoned as a criminal before the bar of God, and in the very form of absolution underwent all the solemnities of the passing a sentence of death. In every case, private or public, the offender was left in utter helplessness during the interval between the commission of the offence, and the offering of the sacrifice. No prayer, however humble; no appeal, however earnest, could avail to abate one iota of his contracted uncleanness. For that he must await an external rite in the flesh; his spirit was bound as it were to the earth, and was unable to rise until its dull and mortal companion, the body, had gone through certain prescribed forms and motions. Here was rebuke, here was perplexity indeed; and then how limited in every way was the pardon obtained. It went as far as the prescribed form of words put up by the priest, and no further; as far as the remission of the particular offence, and no further; and the continual renewal of sacrifice was required to meet the continually renewed guilt. The law was indeed a schoolmaster to bring unto Christ; but it was a stern schoolmaster, whose voice never ceased to chide, whose rigour was ever demanding satisfaction. But we are under no schoolmaster, our spirit is under no bondage. Our sacrifice, full,

perfect, and sufficient for all the sins of the whole world, past and to come, has been offered once; and our High Priest's mediation proceeds from that moment, with unbroken efficacy, to continue until sin with death shall be no more. At every moment, therefore, we can, by appeal to him, obtain the benefits of that sacrifice; at every moment our spirit can rise in prayer, and procure his intercession. We are released from all bondage of the body; time, place, and form, can raise no obstruction to us; we are free, we are spiritual. Tied to the bed of sickness, we are not precluded from our temple; neither prevented from the presence of our priest, who is God over all, blessed for evermore.

3. Jewish intercession could be made only through a descendant of Aaron. Now though an official succession of men may proceed without interruption, as long as the society or nation in which they are included exists, yet this is far from being the case with family succession, of the termination of which we see instances every day. Here then was another point of uncertainty to the Jew. If his temple was brute stones and timber, his priest was frail flesh and blood; and if the axe and firebrand may destroy the one, the sword or the pestilence may extinguish the other. But this was not all the imperfection. His priest, being sinful man, was indebted for the efficacy

of his intercession to imputed holiness; and therefore, in despite of the express covenant of God to accept such mediation, there would arise most uncomfortable doubts upon the following points.

1st. Whether he really was in that state of imputed holiness which was necessary to the efficacy of his mediation. Through neglect, wilful or unintentional, he might have omitted some ceremony prescribed for this purpose; or may have relapsed into a state of defilement since the performance of those ceremonies.

2nd. Was he well assured that all in the rite itself of the sacrifice was done according to rule; whether nothing was omitted, or admitted, by which the whole proceeding was vitiated? The number and minuteness of the ceremonial regulations of his law, could not but subject the Jew to perplexing questions of this kind. But our High Priest liveth for evermore: he is purity itself, and therefore has no offering to make for his own sins; he is truth itself, and will therefore sincerely plead; and he is the son of God, and therefore will effectually plead. Nor does this unearthly character preclude us from the assurance of his sympathy,—an assurance so necessary to our confidence in such a mediator; for he took our nature upon him, suffered temptation, underwent our sorrows. Thus every opening is closed against

doubt, and we may boldly approach the throne of God, confident of the all-sufficiency in every point, and at every time, of our heavenly and everlasting mediator.

4. Jewish intercession was applied to particular sins, selected each for a peculiar atonement: and these were rather infirmities than sins, while the greater transgressions were left without the benefit of any rite of absolution. But the pardon procured by the intercession of Christ is not thus confined to any particular infirmity, nor unequal to do away the greater transgressions. It extends to our whole life. Nay, more: it not only annuls the past, but even in the very act creates the future; for with forgiveness for what has been done in sin, it confers the grace to do in righteousness: and it fills the mind not only with the lightness of heart arising from the having thrown down a burden, but also with the delight experienced from taking up a gift; not only with dismissal of doubt and fear, but with the entertainment of hope and love. Thus its effect pervades the whole mind of man, refining his affections, exalting his thoughts, pacifying the terrors of memory, and presenting views of glory to his foresight.

And now, my brethren, may we not indeed joyfully assent to our Saviour's assertion, "that his burden is light, and his yoke easy?" On this vital

point of mediation, how bound in hand and foot did the Jew approach God's altar? What a slave indeed was he! even the most spiritual-minded, they who looked beyond the letter of the law, to whom the law itself furnished elements of thought which carried their minds far beyond its narrow barrier, felt their spirit at every turn opposed by its wall of fleshly ordinances. They were prisoners in a dungeon, who could overhear the glad sounds of life without, and to whom through its loophole there streamed a ray in tantalizing token of the joyous light around. In all their aspirations they were exalted but to be humbled. After their widest spiritual range, they returned (like runaways to their prison) to the distinction of meats, and all the minute and formal observances which God indeed had imposed, but at the same time had informed them, both by the spirit of the very law which bound them, and by the mouths of his Prophets, whom he sent, to be intrinsically unnecessary. Amid the multitude of bulls and rams slain in the Temple, their reason informed by God, cried out to them that such brute offerings could not avail to take away sin, and his messengers were exclaiming, "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams;" that "the sacrifice of God was a contrite spirit," and demanded whether "God would

drink the blood of bulls, and eat the fat of rams." Thus were they daily rebuked, thus straitened, thus imposed with a hard, and, at the same time, unnecessary task.

What shall we say, then, my brethren, of them who would bring us back into all this jeopardy? And they do bring us back, who invest the human minister of Christ with the mediatorial character; they bring back all the carnal purifications, and all the doubts of efficacy which we saw attendant upon Jewish intercession. Let us stand fast in the liberty with which Christ hath made us free, who is our only mediator and advocate, and who hath once and for ever offered the only sacrifice.

II. Let us now proceed to the apostolical part of our Lord's office in our covenant. As our Lord, though represented in this character by human agents in the two preceding stages, yet did not altogether exclude his own occasional and particular interference as head of the church, but appeared and directed his deputed agents amid mighty and fearful signs and wonders, so notwithstanding his appointment of apostles and ministers, he did, in the infancy of the Christian church, which called for especial assistance, manifest his open and direct superintendence, as on the day of Pentecost, in the conversion of St. Paul, and other remarkable events of that

period. Nor will an attentive and pious mind fail to trace the mighty though secret working of its great superintendent, in the series of events which have befallen his church in later days, however they may assume to a more circumscribed view the shape of effects of ordinary agency; each single event may appear natural, but the series is miraculous.

The ordinary charges, however, of government and instruction, he has deputed to human hands, in analogy with the constitution of human society in general, whose order is maintained by chosen members of itself. These he deputed to his Apostles, and their successors for ever; first in the commission which he gave to the twelve and the seventy, and finally, in the moment previous to his ascension, in those memorable words, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo! I am with you, even unto the end of the world."—(MATTH. xxviii. 19, 20. To which may be added, MATTH. xviii. 18, 19, 20).

It is then the prophetical part only (taking that word in its wide sense) of his threefold office, which our Lord has deputed to the Christian ministry; the strictly prophetic gift, that of foretelling the

future, was indeed imparted, but only for a season. There remain the conservation of his oracles, the teaching of his word, and the government of his Church,—all three intimately connected indeed, but yet not so entirely, but that one may devolve to an individual in a much larger proportion than the others: for instance, the conservation of his word will require a more deep and extensive learning, than will be called forth by the ordinary duties of teaching it, since it establishes what the other takes for granted, the authority of Scripture, and authenticity of its documents; while the government of the church again will demand qualities, many of which are not required, and the rest necessary but in an inferior degree, to the mere teacher. To these offices God ordained in his church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then workers of miracles; after that, gifts of healing, ministers, governors, diversity of tongues.—(1 Cor. xii. 28). Into these distinctions it is now unnecessary to enter; we will proceed, therefore, to consider the Christian minister in the general, and first view him in comparison with the Jewish teacher.

1. He had a predecessor in the Jewish prophet, in common with whom he has to uphold the honour and glory of God, amid an unbelieving generation. He has to unfold his blessings given and to be given,—

to signify his everlasting counsels,—to promise pardon and peace, or to denounce judgment and woe,—to publish unwelcome truths,—to appear before kings and rulers,—to rebuke the impenitent Ahab,—to comfort the pious Hezekiah. But far more excellent than the heralds of the Christ who was coming, is the embassador of the Christ who is come; they saw the ray, these behold the sun; they preached the hope of things unseen, these announce the substance. They saw in part, and could unfold but in part; these have the whole scheme of God's redemption gloriously unveiled before them. They sang of him who was to come in the flesh, a man of sorrows; these tell of him who is to come at the last day in glory to judge the quick and the dead. If the least in the kingdom of heaven be greater than him who was greater than all the prophets before him, * great indeed may we conclude to be the superiority of the Christian minister to the Jewish prophet.

2. Still higher does he stand than the Jewish priest, to whom was committed the teaching of the law of ordinances, the exposition of the letter; † while the unveiling of the spirit was confined to the prophets. Supposing him, therefore, to act up to the duty of the most faithful expounder of God's word, how

* Matth. xi. 11. † 2 Chron. xv. 3.

narrow after all must have been his views, how timid his exposition. Accustomed himself to officiate in the temple with a number of minutely prescribed ceremonies, and hedged in by the text of the law, which he had to interpret, everywhere by positive injunctions, beyond which he dared not enlarge; can we wonder if he went not beyond the letter which killeth, until, like the captive who hugs his chain, he took delight in narrowing to still greater straitness what was so narrow already; and can we wonder if the people, amid all their stupid carnality, observed a want of freedom and authority in this unedifying literality: such was the Scribe, such the Pharisee, who, in addition, by their pretended traditions, threw a veil still more thick upon the spirit of the word. At other times, the expounder running into the opposite extreme, escaped from the literality of the text into the wilderness of moral allegory, and despising and despised by the vulgar, left his flock still more unedified than the former: such was the Sadducee. But the Christian minister has to expound the liberty of the spirit, and not the slavery of the letter; the spirit of the Gospel, not the letter of the law: for prescribed and outward observances, he has to inculcate inward and essential principles; for formal ethical precepts, he has to infuse energetic spiritual motions. The volume which

he interprets, gives his spirit unbounded range; day after day it may feed in fresh pastures, drink from fresh streams, nor can it visit, to his life's end, more than a small portion of the regions open to its excursions: unfettered by distinctions of meat, ablutions of the body, sacrifices of brutes, observance of carnal forms and prescriptions; free from such a body of death, it expatiates over the boundless prospect of the life to come; gazing on the mighty works of its Master and Creator in the spiritual world,—on his conquest over sin and death,—on the assurance of pardon and peace,—on the sanctifying graces of the Holy Spirit,—on the life everlasting. His understanding is in no danger of being led captive by a round of formal duties; for he officiates after no mechanical formulary, he is engaged in no dull handling of earthly elements. The vessels about which he is concerned are living spirits, vessels of the Holy Ghost: the vestments about which he must be careful, are the robes of righteousness: the washings with which he has to do, is the laver of regeneration, and the washing away the filth of a bad conscience: the leprosy on which he has to pronounce, is the leprosy of sin in the soul: the temple in which he ministers, is the church of God,—no building of stones and timber, but an assembly of living spirits: the altar at which he

ministers, is not made of earth, but is spiritual, set up in the heart of the spiritual man: the sacrifice which he offers, is no shedding of the blood of bulls and goats, but is the communion of the body and blood of Christ, taken to the soul with praise and thanksgiving. The knowledge required by his office, is no minute and barren information on rites and ceremonies, it is the knowledge of the heart of man, and of the spirit of God: of the heart of man, in order to detect all its windings and turnings, and so dispel all its delusions and perverseness, and for which purpose is demanded the constant watching of his own: of the spirit of God, in order to be able faithfully to unfold his will and counsel, for which purpose he must diligently search the Scriptures in study, in meditation, and in prayer. All the duties, including even the teaching of the Jewish priest, were confined to the temple, and these in fit analogy with his temporal covenant, were but for a season: on the expiration of his course, he returned to his proper city, to a life of religious ease and calm. But the house of prayer contains but a fragment of the services of the Christian minister. His commission comes direct from heaven, and not from Mount Sinai; and the only temple which includes his possible duties is the wide earth. He preaches the covenant made with all mankind, and

not with Abraham only; and deputed by the great Melchisedec, has his charge open to every tribe and nation. His commission is to "go, teach all nations." He blows a trumpet not on Sion only, but in the whole earth, and proclaims to all mankind the acceptable year, the last jubilee.

Such is the minister of the Gospel, compared with the minister of the law. And if deep responsibility confer honour, if the alternative of the highest crown of reward, or lowest degradation of punishment bestow importance, then indeed is the former character one of exceeding dignity: but it is a dignity under which man will tremble, and not triumph; will humble himself, and not exalt. He is not a master amid his brethren, but a spiritual servant, to diligently watch and provide for their wants, and be within the continual call of their spiritual necessities. The greater his talents the more extensive is the service which he is bound to yield; and he must put the whole man, in body, soul, and mind, to the work; adding to faith diligence, and to diligence knowledge; so that by labouring for the salvation of others, he even thus strive to attain his own. His very growth in usefulness and diligence will also increase his growth in humility and lowliness of spirit, since his sphere of duty thus enlarged brings into view more and more to be done, and makes what

is done appear more and more inadequate to that which ought to be done. Well may he exclaim, in the words of the Apostle, "Who is sufficient?" (II. Cor. ii. 16,) many and manifold are the tempers and qualities which he must bring to his work. He is a soldier ever engaged in a spiritual warfare; yea, and a captain in that warfare. He must have unwearied circumspection; be ready against open attack, watchful against secret assault, set the first and best example of patience and hardihood, perseverance and courage, and guide and sustain all committed to his charge, in every trial of weariness, of famine, of the sword. Then again, he is a shepherd, whose flock is feeding far and wide, over which he must watch by day, that is, in easy times, lest they extend their pasture into the wilderness, and be lost; and which he must gather carefully by night, when times of difficulty are come, and watch lest the wolf assail the fold. He is a husbandman also, whom God hath put into his vineyard, where he must labour diligently; digging, watering, and dressing, that his master may receive fruit plentifully. He is a builder too, a builder of God's temple, of his holy church; of which he must study well the plan, must accurately acquaint himself with it, putting into practice all his knowledge, judgment, and charity, so that he may build

in unison, finish his portion in harmony with the glorious whole; working, as he does, in co-operation with builders of different quarters of the earth, of different ages; with builders of this world, with builders of the world to come. He is a fisher too, but a fisher of men, whom he must gather into the ship of salvation from the depths of sin and corruption; and must fearlessly pursue his occupation by day and by night, be the waters of the world troubled or still, reckless of its monsters below, unappalled by its pirates above. When engaged on shore, it will be in mending his nets, that is, in repairing his shaken fortitude, his fainting perseverance, his failing powers of persuasion, his exhausted knowledge. Again we may exclaim, "Who is sufficient?" not the will of man, but the grace of God.

Thus have I endeavoured, to the best of my power, to draw out before you, in pursuance of my plan, a sketch of the priesthood of the church of God, and especially, by a comparison of the Christian priesthood with such as preceded it, to shew how blessed are we in having been planted in the church of the latter days. In this, as in the former respects, it maintains its striking superiority: we are brought nearer to the Father of Spirits, and endued with far higher graces, and more lofty privileges. In our blessed Saviour,—having died for our sins, and risen

again for our justification,—we have a priesthood, through whom we confidently approach the throne of grace and mercy; not with the timid crouching of the pardoned slave, but with the generous openness of the accepted son. And in his deputed ministers we have guides and instructors on the road of salvation, whom he hath endued with powers and opportunities for their charge, such as were never committed to human hands before. Not a single want is left unsatisfied: we are a people fully equipped, furnished for our journey with all appliances. Our march through this wilderness of the world is supplied with spiritual manna from heaven; our steps through this darkness of sin and woe are directed by a spiritual fire. Let us not provoke God by ingratitude, and fall in the wilderness; but strive to enter the promised land, which Israel won only in the flesh, but which awaits the faithful Christian in the spirit.

# SERMON VIII.

## ON PRAYER.

REVELATIONS i. 5, 6.

*Unto him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.*

IN this passage, and in two others in the New Testament (REV. v. 9, 10; 1. PET. ii. 5, 9), Christians are termed priests: we shall understand the application of this term by attending to the following considerations.

I. The word here translated priest, is not presbyter, but means a sacrificing priest. But such a priest, with the exception of our Saviour, does not exist in the Christian church, still less can the term be applied to Christians in general; it is therefore figurative, as the word "kings" obviously is.

II. The figurative sense is clearly determined:— first from a parallel passage in the Old Testament,

(Exod. xix. 6,) where God says to the Jews, "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." Now to the Jew, having an established priesthood, the term, thus applied, was clearly metaphorical; and familiar as it was, would convey the notion of selection, consecration, sacrifice. With regard to the first and second, every Jew was a figurative priest, from his selection from the rest of the world, and by the imputed holiness consequent on this selection; of this he was put in mind by the numerous ordinances to remedy uncleanness both in individuals and the whole nation, by which he was rendered fit to appear before God, just as his real priest was qualified for his duties by purifications. With regard to his sacrifice, we have only to see to what things Scripture applies this figure; and on turning over its pages we find mention of the sacrifice of praise,* of thanksgiving,† of repentance,‡ of righteousness,‖ of charity;§ and as all these outwardly and inwardly are comprised in prayer, in which we peculiarly make an offering of our thoughts and deeds, our souls and bodies to God, we may understand in one word prayer to be this figurative sacrifice.

---

* Hebr. xiii. 15. † Jer. xxxiii. 11. ‡ Ps. xxii. 17.
‖ Ps. iv. 5. § Phil. iv. 18.

What was applicable to the Jew, is of course still more so to the Christian, who is also selected from the rest of the world, (Rom. xii. 1, 2,) has been washed and consecrated in the laver of regeneration, which confers purity by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ; even as the prescribed sacrifices of purification, and especially that of the day of atonement, obtained it for the Jew. This is the consecration by which he ministers, and in all the above-mentioned passages of the New Testament, our spiritual priesthood is mentioned as a consequence of our Redeemer's sacrifice. We are "a holy priesthood," says St. Peter, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ." And our sacrifice, as in the case of the Jew, will be prayer, proceeding from unfeigned lips, and from a clean conscience. And this our daily sacrifice has the same relation to the sacrifice of Christ, as our figurative priesthood to his real. In the offering of the one we obtain the benefit of his sacrifice, in the character of the other we gain the intercession of his priesthood.

And now, is it not grievous to think, my brethren, that while prayer is ascending every day from millions of bosoms, so few comparatively should be qualified to offer it? All are not within the covenant of Christ; therefore they cannot be spiritual

priests. They have had no consecration, they stand not within the temple, which is the church of Christ. But of those who do stand within the temple, are all indeed qualified? Are they truly thankful, truly penitent, truly resolved upon holiness of life, truly impressed with the efficacy of the intercession of the great high priest? With such a mind must they come, in such robes must they minister, such incense must they burn, such sacrifice must they offer. This most important duty of prayer, this high privilege of the church of God, it is now my intention to discuss; and before proceeding after my plan, to compare the different stages of that church under this head, I will pause to explain more exactly its nature.

As in sacrifice the victim became peculiarly the property of God, so in the sacrifice of prayer we peculiarly abstract our spirit from the world, and yield it up to God; and we may define prayer to be the communion of our souls with God, by the lifting up of our hearts, either with the words of the lips, or in the aspirations of silence. And as communion with God is the great end of our being, it is plain that to this act we must bring the whole man, with all his gifts, helps, knowledge, faculties, and privileges. This act, therefore, is the putting forth of our powers of the spiritual life, of which we are then conscious,

in the same way as we are of our mental, when we task our memory, or exercise our reflection; as we are of our bodily, when we move a hand or foot. We are then, and only then, in the full enjoyment of all our blissful powers of existence. All the rest of our time is like the rest and the sleep, so necessary to our imperfect frame of body and mind. And if in the body our waking hours influence our sleep, furnishing the mind with its peculiar train of dreaming thought, shall not these waking hours of our spirit influence the rest of our life? What trains of glorious and blessed meditation shall they not leave behind? Into what an excellent arrangement of high and solemn thought shall they not have framed the mind, which, when shut out from this its more immediate connexion with the world of spirits, may, in the dream of earthly life, retain and feed upon its waking recollections. Oh! sluggard indeed is he who is unwilling to awake to so glorious a day!

This communion with God implies, of course, the unreserved opening of our hearts to him. If a single cell be kept closed, it is as a wall of partition between us. Then it is, therefore, that we ascertain whereabouts we are amid the wide regions of existence; then we try and search our spirit; then we sound the depth of our affections; then, like blossoms to the sun, we put forth all our understanding,

all our imagination, all our memory,—exercise all the prerogatives given us above the rest of the tribes of creation, as being formed in the image of God. Then, therefore, it is, that coming to a full knowledge of ourselves, and having our faculties quickened, we acutely discern and condemn our unholiness and infirmities; then we acknowledge and confess our unworthiness; and then we perceive distinctly the unbounded mercies of God, and rise from fear, and sorrow, and doubt,—to hope, and love, and joy. Then our connection with the world to come, our prize of immortality, is distinctly assured. Then is a conversation going on between us and our God, between the creator and the thing created, between the giver and the receiver, between immortality and mortality; and as the one opens his bosom, the other pours forth his treasure into it; as the one offers homage and allegiance, the other dispenses his royal bounties. Such communion have we with God, through our high priest, Jesus Christ, being consecrated priests for that purpose by his sacrifice; and such in the prospective virtue of that sacrifice, and through the medium of representation, had the Jew.

Prayer consists of confession of sin, of thanksgiving for mercies, of petition for either the continuance or increase of blessings, of deprecation for the removal or assuagement of afflictions. These last

depend entirely for their success on the sincerity of the two first, and obtain it immediately, or at a distance, according to circumstances. In many cases, and those the most important, by God's blessed economy the very act of prayer obtains the petition. The mind is brought by praying, further and further into a state of spiritual blessedness, until at length the utterance of the lips, entreating comfort and deliverance from temptation, becomes rather the expression of the heart, which at that moment has found what, a moment before, it had not, than of a sense of its destitution. For we are then in God's temple; priests ministering at his altar, with eyes and ears intent upon our duty. The noisy world is shut out, and its affliction cannot reach him whose mind is thus excluded, and in a state of bliss and unchangeableness. Temptation dares not, any more than its evil author, intrude before the presence of God. Other objects of prayer will require time, because they admit of degrees of perfection, and can come but by repeated prayer. Such are a certain amount of grace, of knowledge, of wisdom; a portion of which, insensible, perhaps, at the time, is imparted at every earnest prayer: and if we have faith and patience to persevere to the end, we shall obtain more than we in the first instance imagined to desire;

while one desire satisfied will awake another to be satisfied, and improvement lead on to more improvement. Others, again, as most temporal objects, must be prayed for in such a manner as must interpose delay. We are bidden to ask the greater, in order to obtain the less; the heavenly, in order to obtain the earthly. Thus they will seldom come immediate or singular, but in their appropriate season, and with their due concomitants. For example, in asking for length of life, our prayer will not be directed to the longer enjoyment of it, but to our being enabled to bring to a ripe conclusion the great work of life,—our own sanctification. If we ask for fruitful seasons, we shall not have in our minds the luxurious ease and plenty which they supply; but the peace, the charity, the holy leisure, the thankfulness and dedication of heart to God, in all hope and joy, which they are apt to diffuse among us. If we ask for peace, then the peace of our particular time and nation will come included under the peace of the reign of the prince of peace, when not only the body but the spirit too shall have peace. If we entreat for relations and friends, it will be for them as intimate fellow-members of Christ's church, and therefore for their spiritual health and wealth, in the train of which their temporal shall follow also. Thus we

shall in all things obey our Lord's charge, "to pray first for the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;" and we shall reap his promise also, and find all corresponding temporal blessings added unto them.

According to the view which we have taken, prayer is a special privilege accorded to men by express revelation. This will further appear if we consider the requisites to its efficacy.

I. It requires a special promise on the part of God to hear it, and a knowledge of his attributes by which to shape it. To prove this we have only to turn to those among the heathen, whose very investigations into the natures of God and man, led them to conclude the inefficacy of prayer, when addressed to the supreme God, and to betake themselves to the gods of their country as mediators between him and them. The notion which they had formed of him being derived from a severe process of abstraction from every thing human, elevated indeed the understanding, but repelled the feelings. There was nothing in their notion of him to which they could plead. If he was almighty and all-wise, he was also passionless and unchangeable. Hence the philosopher contented himself with the conception of this being.

II. As prayer is the opening of the heart to God, telling out its hopes and fears, these must have some

object presented by God; for the telling out of hopes and fears on purely worldly matters, is unworthy the name. But how, without revelation, shall man have these spiritual objects? Another life must be revealed, forgiveness of sins must be revealed. These hold out the only lasting objects of hope and fear to the human mind; nor without the knowledge of these has he either the wish or the permission to approach with prayer, properly so called.

III. The mind must have some manifest acts or words of God upon which to plead, some embodying, as it were, of his abstract attributes: the world indeed is full of his wondrous works, but yet, as we know from the case of the heathen, they do not come home to men's minds in that individual shape which alone can interest them. They seem also, matters of course, and may, as far as they know, administer to other beings specially, to themselves but accidentally. They are, too, as far as they affect them, but of the present hour. Now to their view whom he hath called by revelation, he has proposed mighty deeds of the past, wrought in especial interventions; and again, by means of prophecy, fixed their eyes on glorious works of mercy to come: so that whereever in time the mind may place itself,—in past, present, or future,—the sight is full of objects displaying, and particularly directing upon the beholder himself, the

wisdom, the goodness, and the power of God; not in abstract, but in substance.

Let us now proceed to examine the comparative advantages of the Patriarch, Jew, and Christian. The Patriarch had from the mouth of Adam an account of the blissful days of Paradise, and of the intervention of God at the fall; he had also, from the same source, the prophecy announcing his restoration, so that his retrospect and prospect was bright with heart-stirring operations of God in his especial behalf; and these imparted their appropriate colour to the present and ordinary works of God lying before his eyes. Thus his matter was abundant; his heart had sufficient upon which to plead.

But comparatively with the Jew, he was distant indeed. This favoured worshipper could call upon the Almighty as having announced himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, his fathers. God had intervened, by a long series of most signal and glorious mercies, and held up to his eyes a long and burning train of prophecy, growing more specific every day. The very land in which he was living, was a testimony and pledge of his peculiar mercy and love; and all the temporal blessings which it afforded him, came thus specially from God's hands, and mingled harmoniously with the great mass of spiritual mercies, past and to come. He was a priest

indeed, with innumerable offerings to lay upon God's altar; the dedicatory sacrifice of Solomon did not more exceed in magnificence that of Abel, than the spiritual sacrifice of the Jew, considered under the head of matter for prayer, did that of the patriarch. How beautiful, how glorious are his prayers; the great body of them is still put up by the church of God, which is still in the enjoyment of his blessings.

But how distant indeed was he compared with the Christian; the Christian has all the glorious past, present, and future, of the Jew in retrospect. But above all, God has appeared to him not through angels, not from Mount Sinai, but in human flesh, in domestic life. The Christian can appeal to him on human attributes, on the love which he himself entertains; on the mercy, which he himself shows; on the justice, which he himself administers. He can appeal to one who has called himself not the God of his fathers, but his brother: so that our High Priest mediates not only directly and officially by his human nature, but also incidentally and instrumentally by his human qualities; by means of which we can feel ourselves one with him who is one with the Father. Our retrospect, in addition to the Jewish, is his incarnation and whole sojourn on earth; his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

Our present view is his sitting at the right hand of God in mediation for us, together with all the gifts pouring down on us in his name; our prospect is his coming again in judgment, and the life everlasting, when all his glorious promises, still due, shall have been fulfilled. Priests, spiritual priests indeed are we, rich beyond all telling in the abundance of offerings for our sacrifice; and we have received a fresh and special ordination from God in those words, (Jоb. xvi. 23), "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he shall give it you." In addition to all this, he has provided us one whose help shall never fail to make our sacrifice perfect, the advocacy of the Holy Spirit, which intercedeth for us with groans which cannot be uttered.

To illustrate by example this our blessed superiority, let us take up the most fervent, the most explicit of such Jewish prayers as are still at this very day used by the church of Christ; and let us, if possible, divest ourselves, during the perusal, of our Christian associations. Let what was dark to the Jew, be dark to us; let the great Redeemer be obscurely future, and not gloriously come. Do we not appear far away, even where the Jew felt himself to be most near? Now let us take up the prayer again with our eyes open, and our heart quick to all our spiritual happiness; read it, and then close with the

words, "through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour." Are we not brought near at once, taken up like Elijah from earth, caught up like the apostle to the third heaven? Here is indeed one great reason, exclusive of the intrinsic merits of the hymns, why the Christian church has retained so much of the praise and prayer of the Jewish. To all who are diligent to understand, it carries back the thoughts to the glorious train of mercies by which God prepared the way of our dispensation, reminds us of our eminently superior privileges, and every expression comes to the heart with a sense of glorious prophecy most gloriously fulfilled, and with the consciousness of ourselves being the blissful enjoyers of the fulfilment.

Such being our means, let us examine our duty on the head of prayer, which we shall distinguish into private and public.

Most of what may be said (on the first especially) has been already anticipated. We have been both commanded and invited to pray. Prayer is to us the only channel of communication with God,—the only duty in which we pointedly fulfil the purpose of our being,—the only acknowledged vehicle of his gifts,—the only refuge from a corrupt and troublous world. Without it the word of God, sown by his teachers, has no ground in the heart

wherein to take root; without it we are mere animals, beasts of the earth, creatures of rapine and prey.

The transition to the consideration of the objects of public prayer, is short and easy, from some principal duties of private. In his private petitions, the individual must never forget that he is one of many, a member of a body, through the head of which he has access to the throne of grace and mercy. He is bound to many brethren in the unity of one altar, one faith, one baptism; so that his prayers must be directed to their welfare as to a part of his own, and even the most special and private part of his devotions cannot leave his neighbour out of all consideration. To them his conduct for good or bad can never be indifferent, bodily or morally; and therefore his petitions for grace to amend his life before God, will include the desire of avoiding offence before men; with the earnest wish to build up his fellows in redemption, so that every thing which he may think, say, or do, may tend to the glory of God and his Saviour Jesus Christ. Here then is a close, indissoluble bond between private and public prayer. Private must proceed upon the understanding that its offerer is a member of a society, and to this society he cannot be counted to belong, if he shun its assemblies. He cannot put up petitions for the brethren in spirit, if

he avoids their spiritual communion. This would be like thinking to love God whom he hath not seen, and hating his brother whom he hath seen. Both modes of prayer are necessary from the very constitution of our nature as social beings, both are imposed by Christ's ordinance, both are blessed with his promise. Just as the Jewish priest united his public and private devotions, and offered first for himself, and then for the people; so closely united must the truly spiritual priest maintain his private and public offices, nor deem that one will be accepted when the other is neglected. If he unite not the two, he is no priest; he has no altar, no sacrifice, no temple.

To be in communion, therefore, with the invisible church, we must be in communion with the visible; to be in communion with Jesus Christ its great head, with all the angelic host of heaven, with the spirits of just men made perfect, we must also be in communion with the brethren who are labouring together with ourselves in the infirmities of the flesh, and looking for help to the same Redeemer.

For this assembling ourselves together we have the special promise of our Lord, that where two or three are met together in his name, there is he in the midst of them; and for neglecting such assembling, we have his threats of casting us out of

his church; for in his Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle of Christ strictly charges them not to neglect the assembling of themselves, and proceeds to shew that such neglect is the commencement of an apostacy, after which there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. Now, he is writing to persons who were in danger of this sin from the violence of persecution without. Will it be more excusable in us, who commit it from inward choice? In them the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak; in us not even the spirit will be willing, and the flesh will be proud and rebellious. They would err from severe compulsion of pain; we from mere recklessness and wantonness of ease.

The benefits of public prayer may be discussed as received through the outward, and through the inward, senses.

Much indeed comes through the outward. Not derived from the beauty and magnificence of the temple; not from shewy pomp of ceremonial; not from charms of song and music, and other stimulants to the dull senses, which rouse them indeed to a certain degree, but often prevent them effectually from rising higher, by constantly rivetting the attention, and intruding objects of the senses on the moments of abstraction,—the sights and sounds of earth on the contemplation of heaven, flesh upon spirit. But

that which delights and teaches the eyes, is the sight of Christ's flock; that which charms and instructs the ears, is the sound of joint prayer. When we thus join ourselves in uniformity and equality of prayer, all of different stations, different pursuits, different dispositions, different ages,—the rich and the poor, the merchant and the husbandman, the wise and the weak, the healthy and the infirm, the young and the old,—what a varied family does that of Christ appear; how manifold are our wants, and how surpassingly great his power and loving-kindness who undertakes to supply them all,—who sheds upon each of them his appropriate gift, and they all, in different tongues as it were, tell out the mighty works of God. And when in despite of all the obvious differences in the flesh, we find ourselves, by the very act of our meeting, all equal and alike before the throne of God, what should we reckon of such differences, but as mere accidents, utterly inessential to our real nature? If God, who made us, and knows our nature to its inmost recesses, regard them not, why shall we so painfully attend to them? Such differences, however, will act still more beneficially, if they act but as outward fleshly signs, to lead us to think of most important inward spiritual differences; of growth or diminution of grace, of wealth, of poverty, of spiritual knowledge,

of performance or neglect of God's will, of the understanding or ignorance of his word, of the subjection or dominion of the flesh, of the willingness or reluctance of the spirit. These distinctions are indeed essentials, and no accidents. On either consideration, the world and its code is set aside; and faith and hope and charity bring together, whom its fraud, its hatred, and violence, would fain keep asunder. Here, therefore, all boasting of the flesh is humbled, all meekness of spirit is exalted. With regard to the inward, as the very sight of assembled men is delightful to him who has been long solitary, so is the joining of our spirits in prayer to each one after an interval of lonely meditation and prayer. We refresh ourselves, as it were, with conversation, and with the exercise of our social faculties after seclusion, and the exclusive indulgence of our individual. And assuredly, if interchange of thought, mutual converse and debate, the participation of pleasure and instruction, the imparting of advice and comfort, form the essentials of worldly conversation,—so do the conscious expression of mutual wants, confession of common sins, partaking of common forgiveness, consolation, and peace, give its value and character to our spiritual conversation. Such conversation is that which pervades the society of the church of Christ, at those seasons when it assembles

as distinctly such, as having separated itself from the world and its lusts and cares, and thus put itself into exclusive unison with its head, forsaking all for Him, and anticipating its future blissful estate, when, without a spot or wrinkle on her garments, she shall be united a glorious bride to the heavenly bridegroom, never to be put asunder. At her time of public prayer alone can she enjoy an unmixed foretaste of her future bliss and peace; at that time alone can each of her members be certain of enjoying spiritual fellowship with his brethren of the life to come. Then all the hindrances which the world interposes to the unity of spirit are removed; the disruption of the bonds of peace is closed up, for its passions and its assaults are at least for a time put aside; then the social joy of the spirits of the saints is unfettered; then the charity, which is the prelude to the links of love which shall bind the blessed in the world to come, is assured, We are all one with each other, by being one with him, who is one with the Father.

Can any one therefore imagine that he shall attain to the fellowship of the saints in light in the life to come, who despises its preparatory elements in this life; can he indeed entertain any adequate notion of it; nay, can he have ever entertained any notion at all? It is easy for any one to remark upon the

general appearance of a congregation, and demand what ought he to conclude from its prevailing listlessness and inattention; whether it be really that body which I have been describing, or an assemblage of unsanctified flesh and blood; and ask, if the latter, what becomes of the duty which has been enjoined as so imperative? The person who is thus prejudiced, before he enters the house of prayer, is destitute of the charity which he should carry thither in order to enjoy its benefits; and he, who having entered, is at leisure to remark upon his neighbours, has gone thither to as little purpose. But were it certain that there was but one, even one only, who was sincere in his attendance there, this would not excuse his neglect; with that one brother he may have joined his spirit, and where even two or three are met together in Christ's name, there is he amidst them. To excuse himself therefore at all, this person must be certain that not one single supplicant in the house of prayer is sincere. It may be asserted that a supposition so dreadfully uncharitable could never enter into the mind of a man who was in the least capable of sharing any spiritual intercourse with a brother; hardened must be the heart, and blinded indeed the understanding, of such an arguer. The world had never before received such an invitation to public prayer as our Saviour has given in his

memorable promise just quoted. How different from the authoritative injunction upon the Jew. "Three times a year shall thy males appear before me!" And how different the mode of his presence! Not as to a gross people, in the substance of a sensible glory, but as to a spiritual people, in the spirit; not limited to place, as that was to the temple; not limited to time, as the approach to that was. The Jew was told to fear the Lord his God, as a servant. We are bidden to love the Lord our God, as sons. He, therefore, was commanded to approach, as to a haughty and imperious king, through a long series of formal delays interposed by ceremonies of purification and sacrifice. But us he calls immediately to his presence, as a parent his children: our purification has been made by washing of the Holy Spirit; our sacrifice has been offered by our High Priest Jesus Christ; and his ears are ever open to our prayers.

# SERMON IX.

## ON REPENTANCE.

EZEK. xviii. 27.

*When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.*

THE Jewish prophet has here furnished a complete definition of repentance, applicable to every period of the church of God. According to this, it consists of two parts; one of which is the turning away from his wickedness, the other is the doing that which is lawful and right: in other words, it implies the turning away from the world, and the turning towards God. And he has crowned his statement with a declaration of the blessing which God has promised upon such a change, even of the salvation of the sinner, through the remission of his sins. These three heads of this most important doctrine must be carefully distinguished, because they have no necessary connexion with each other, none which man's

reason could lead him to discover. It is God's free mercy which binds them together,—it is his revelation which assures us of their union; and the knowledge and acknowledgment of their connexion is one among those vital differences which have ever distinguished the sons of God from the children of the world, which set apart the sons of Shem from the sons of Ham, the Israelite from the Gentile, and the Christian from the Heathen.

That this is the nature of their connexion, will appear from a very few considerations.

I. A man may forsake former sins, and yet not turn to God. The world, at some point or other, ever disgusts its votaries; ever, if they live but long enough to make a certain progress in its delights; and the same palling satiety which has dismissed successive objects of appetite, at length takes away the appetite itself. But many circumstances continually intervene to abridge or prevent so long an indulgence of sin. Men are deterred by a sense of their own interest,—by a regard to worldly reputation,—by apprehension of temporal consequences,—by accidents which put it out of their power, however the will may be at hand, such as want of means, absence, infirmity, old age. In all such cases, the foregoing of sin is no more an act of obedience to God, than is its termination at their death, which

cuts off all opportunities of sin at once and for ever. Sin, which would supply a particular gratification to the body, is renounced in favour of a superior gratification, or is put beyond their reach. Nay, men may not only abandon sin, but even be sorry for it, without turning to God. Its consequences may be such as to make them ashamed of their folly, to smart under chastisement, and therefore to loathe the remembrance of it, deeming it a grievous and intolerable burden. And yet this shall amount to nothing better than the painful and distracting feeling of remorse, which arises from the consciousness of having wilfully thrown away our own happiness. Thus far went Cain, thus far went Pharaoh, thus far went Saul, thus far went Judas; yea, and thus far went even the devils in hell, and are going still farther,—and yet to all eternity will never arrive at the second stage of repentance. So far from it, that their deepening remorse only deepens the depth of that tremendous gulf which separates them from the bliss of God's presence. Though, therefore, sorrow for sin be indeed in the road to repentance, we no more on that account advance towards it, than we do to the leading object of a road, by merely being upon it. Though it be indeed the first step, we no more on that account pass beyond, than the person who chances to place his foot on the lowest step of

the flight of stairs which lead to the door of God's temple, therefore enters it. That step we may have taken to avoid the pressure of a crowd, or to abridge our road; and, lying in a frequented thoroughfare, it may be trodden in the course of the day by thousands, not one of whom turns to tread the next above. Yet how common is the error of mistaking this kind of sorrow for a godly sorrow; and how many have deemed themselves at peace with God, merely because they were at war with the world.

II. Neither is there any necessary connexion between addressing ourselves to God, and obtaining his forgiveness. Gross and carnal minds may indeed imagine that God's indignation may, like the wrath of proud and vengeful man, be appeased by sorrow and submission, or even be bought off by costly offerings. But acute and disciplined intellects arrive at a very different conclusion. They see in God a power, which has no need of sympathizing with the weakness of man; a holiness, which can admit of no compromise with unholiness; a supremacy, which can brook no particle of rebellion; a justice, which cannot take into favour an offender; and a mercy, which, in the narrow glimpses obtained by them, serves but to perplex and confound them, seeing it shed the rain upon the just and upon the unjust. How shall they hence conclude the forgiveness of sin? Such

men, therefore, in their sorrow for the commission of sin, would rather turn away from God than seek him, unless it be natural for man to seek punishment. Revelation it is, (as we have before shewn,) which alone assures us that the turning to God shall win his forgiveness.

The mercy of God, thus stepping into these two intervals, and thus blending into one what were otherwise utterly unconnected, now gives rise to two considerations; first, on the general promise of pardon to the penitent, and next on God's special call upon the individual to turn and repent.

I. The revelation of forgiveness on repentance is necessarily coeval with the church of God, which is founded upon it; its declaration comes to us included in the promise made to Adam of a Redeemer, nor had Adam been in a fit state to be party to the covenant into which God then entered with him, were he not in a state of penitence. The promise was farther daily repeated to him in the typical rite of sacrifice, which he daily with contrite confession of sin offered for himself and his family, and which was thus at once an assurance and a vehicle of pardon: we need not then go farther to seek instances of this doctrine in the patriarchal church, and will only quote the beautiful passage of Job, in which it is so affectingly put forth. "If

thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles; then truly shalt thou lift up thy face without spot, and shalt be stable, and shalt not fear, but thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that are past."—(xi. 13, &c.) We need not seek instances of its declaration in the next covenant, when God, not only through the daily sacrifice, but also through the mouth of his prophets, was calling his people to repent and be forgiven; how completely it was declared, the passage, chosen for the text, bears witness. All that remained obscure was the cause for which God bestoweth this precious boon of pardon, and this portion flashed into glorious and dazzling light by the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Being the very fundamental doctrine of his church, God has solemnly promulgated it at the opening of each new dispensation, and this was still more necessary, because at those periods mankind had fallen into a very general apostacy. Noah, a preacher of righteousness, proclaimed it before the flood, which began a new stage of the patriarchal church. Israel was commanded on the day previous to the delivery of the law from Mount Sinai, to sanctify himself for to-day and to-morrow, and wash his clothes,

(Exod. xix. 19),* in which charge assuredly every pious mind would understand much more than a dress of outward purity, in which to appear before the visible glory of the Lord God of Hosts. He would understand that the heart must be clean, and not the garments only; and how shall the heart be cleansed, but by repenting and turning unto God? We ourselves are praising and imploring God under that very covenant whose harbinger cried out to the whole world,—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! and, at a signal time indeed was this proclamation made; the whole world, Jewish and Gentile, was apostate, while the last veil was going to be taken off from God's mystery of salvation; the real substantial sacrifice was going to be offered, mankind was going to be openly, palpably convicted of sin, by the suffering of the promised Redeemer on the cross. Men are, therefore, by this last proclamation, called to repentance, in such a manner as they never were before; and such as neglect its summons will sin in such a manner as never did offender before.

II. But vain had been the warning voice of proclamation, had God gone no farther; it had indeed been a voice crying in the wilderness, it had

* See also Deut. xxx. 3.

been a shouting in the ears of the deaf, it had been commanding the dead to rise, without imparting to them the power of life. But God, in calling upon man to repent, has also enabled him to do it by special means, which it is now time to consider.

So little is man able to furnish himself with the requisite means, so entirely do they come from God, that in more places than one Scripture mentions repentance as a gift of God: it is so in whatever way we view it.

I. Let us view it as supplied by the channel of the ordinary visitations of Providence. God, at the very moment of turning the Christian's face away from the world by any visitation, invites him by the act to turn it upon himself in heaven. This should seem to be as necessary an alternative as darkness and light. To him, therefore, God makes immediate appeal in every event which raises his dissatisfaction with the world; and the visitation, however temporally severe, is spiritually considered a gift of golden price indeed. The wounds inflicted are but the openings through which he pours in his oil and balm. And not only does he call us to himself by calling us away, by dissatisfaction with the world, by sickness, want, sorrow, and anguish; but oftentimes also by a spirit-stirring note, which completely draws off our attention for the time

from the voice of the world, he invites us directly to himself,—by unhoped for restoration to health or wealth, unexpected rescue from danger, unlooked for happiness, and by innumerable occurrences in which the thankful and devout heart is ready to acknowledge God's special intervention. And thus it is, that on this side and on that, above and below, trumpeted heralds of God are set to summon us to repentance; and if we neither hear them nor see them, we have foregone the commonest principles of our spiritual nature; we have subdued even that elementary curiosity which is necessary to the maintenance of its existence; we have severed the golden chain by which God would hold us to him, in our wanderings in this wilderness below.

II. It will appear still more specially a gift, if we proceed from the consideration of these loud and obvious calls, to that of the still small voice by which he sometimes addresses us much more effectually. These occasions are far more numerous than the world is apt to imagine. How often can a man date his change of heart and turning to God from something, which to all other eyes, and even to his own at any other time, appears trivial and inadequate to so great a consequence; but what more trivial than a burning bush: yet God was in that bush, speaking to the salvation of Israel; and

here is God in the occurrence calling the sinner to escape from his worse than Egyptian bondage. An object contemplated but with passing attention,—a word from a person not looked up to with any particular reverence,—a trifling accident in our way which we scarce recked of,—a passage of Scripture fraught with no obviously superior importance, and turned out by apparently the merest chance,—these have often been the holy ground on which God hath chosen that His spirit should meet our spirit: and what had else suggested but a random momentary thought, being now the vehicle of his grace, has entered, abided, and leavened the whole mass of feeling and of understanding. Of such vehicles of God's preventing grace, who has not heard from the testimony of others; of their existence who can doubt, if he attend to the internal motions of his mind, and observe how continually our thoughts arise, independent of any call of our own? Some one may here object, that if this grace of God calling us to repentance, be thus independent of us, what need have we to exert ourselves; why not sit down, and await at leisure its proper and appointed season? It is not here the place to canvass the ways by which God works together with us: how the free agency of the latter is the instrument of the former, and the constraint of God is

the choice of man. It will be sufficient to ask who ever delayed to raise his hand or stir his foot, from the conviction that God's operation was necessary to enable him so to do. Experience in this case has certified to us that we can so do, and God's express promise in the other ought equally to assure us, that our exertion will be attended with God's co-operation. If God sometimes calls us when not exerting ourselves, what is this but an argument that he will so much the more assist us when we are exerting ourselves? If God sometimes intervenes to insert a holy thought in a train not directed to him, will he not ever sanctify with his grace a train which is directed to him? If a grain of wheat chance to spring up occasionally in our field, shall we therefore neglect to sow? The instances which prove to us the preventing grace of God, should in like manner stir us up to ensure it by those exertions by which we are conscious, through God's promise, that we can. Sinners indeed often find themselves so far fallen away as to feel convinced that nothing less than some special intervention of God can recall them: they become therefore desperate. And yet which of them, in a long and dangerous sickness, from which he felt that nothing less than God's special mercy could raise him, ever neglected all human means of restoration to health?

Much more reasonably may they (not with a faint hope, but in full reliance on God's recorded promise) avail themselves of the means which he has put into their power.

III. And more special does this gift become, in proportion to the length of time which we have suffered to glide by without applying ourselves to the ordinary and offered means of obtaining it. As in every other case so in that of change of mind,—the opportunities presented to us for effecting it, diminish to our perception in number and importance, as we proceed further and further in slighting them. Thus a portion of them perishes to us daily, neither can any art or contrivance of man recall them. As well may the greybeard demand back from the grave the mates of former years, as endeavour to resuscitate these golden attendants upon his better days. He is left alone, abandoned both by one and the other; he has outlived them all. Our experience both from without and from within, tells us, that this miserable destitution must in too many cases occur. The most vigilant among us has to weep over opportunities neglected and irrevocable: what then has been the loss, how incalculable in price and amount, to the reckless; to those who, ever intent on the present hour, neither looked for warning wisdom to the past, nor for

cautious foresight to the future; whose whole life was to-day,—to whom there was neither yesterday nor morrow; who lay like a dead body fixed in one spot, passive to all accidents, unconscious of the past life, insensible to the life to come? But behold the overpowering mercy of God! Is health after a long and desperate sickness; is prosperity after a weary period of severe distress; is joy after nights and days of deep and prolonged sorrow,—are these reckoned special gifts of God's intervention? What then shall we think of his raising the sinner's spirit, which has been long bowed down to the very dust of this carnal world? Is it not the miraculous raising of the crooked cripple; is it not a spiritual resurrection of the dead? Taken in every view, therefore, repentance, coming to a sinner, is a special and signal gift of God: it is a grace which we cannot, any more than any other, confer upon ourselves; and yet is so far from being placed beyond our reach, that we may rather say that it has been most anxiously intruded into it; while at the same time it argues the utmost infatuation of recklessness to neglect its opportunities, under the notion that we can recall them at will.

Having thus considered the call to repentance, let us proceed to discuss the work itself, beginning from the second stage of it, in which the heart, now partly

weaned from the world, first addresses itself to God. Of the heart I have spoken, as being but partly weaned at this stage; and we should be much mistaken, and most grievously discouraged, did we imagine repentance to be of a day, and not of years. Its two elements, namely, the renunciation of the world, and the conversion to God, being both gradual, of course the whole is gradual likewise.

I. With regard to the first, let us only reflect how manifold and how intricate are the bonds of entanglement by which the world holds us captive. They are not only bonds of strong and wayward passion, links of iron and brass, obvious and palpable to the dullest sense; but they are also fine and silken, an intricate net-work, so subtle as to escape our unpurified eye: bonds formed by the gentlest affections, by the most amiable feelings, which sit so easy, so accommodate themselves to all our motions, that we imagine ourselves free. Here lies the pith of our resistance to the world; here is the crisis of our struggle. How many persons, for instance, who would maintain the dictates of their conscience most manfully against open force, yet have yielded to them gentle influence: how many, who would turn with abhorrence from a direct and open temptation to sin, have been drawn into it by indirect and covert invitation: how many, who blamed or pitied a neighbour whom they saw under its

gross and open tyranny, have all the while been equally under its invisible power. To escape from such bonds, requires two qualities bestowed by God's grace, both of them of gradual growth; discernment, to see those secret ties, and resolution, to snap them asunder. These will grow stronger and stronger by exercise; and exercise they will have, to the end of life, until its last thread be broken.

II. With regard to the second, ask of those who have been long in the habit of keeping God before their minds; hear them confess how unsteady, after all their aspirations, is the hold of their sight upon him; how the due notion at which they would arrive, floats and flickers before them; in what perplexity they find themselves, when endeavouring to select it out and make it the leading idea, amid the less worthy and tumultuary crowd which is hurrying through their bosom; hear them acknowledge to what various and singular expedients they are often obliged to resort, in order to rouse their dull feelings, and express in their minds a due sense of his continual presence; an adequate apprehension of his awful attributes of majesty, power, holiness, and justice; or a proper estimate of his exceeding loving kindness and mercy. If such be the case with those who are far advanced on their course of amendment, how must it be with him who confronts, as it were, his God

for the first time? Brought from outer darkness into the intolerable blaze of the majesty of his presence, what can be his feeling, but that of overpowering fear, which, for the moment, sees no other attributes in God than inevitable ubiquity, inexorable justice? This, however, is the beginning of wisdom, and as, in God's moral economy, chastisement introduces happiness; so in his spiritual, horror and dismay usher in the sense of his gentle attributes of mercy, love, and forgiveness, which arrive, in the end, in company with hope. So then here is a progressive state from fear to love, the penitent casting out every day somewhat of the first, in proportion as he imbibes of the second. Penitence becomes thus gradually a more calm and staid quality, but at the same time, it deepens in feeling, for the growing purity of the bosom, arising from the grace of our communication with God, makes us daily more sensible to the iniquity of our former sins; the lightness of our yoke reminds us more strongly of our previous burden; our improving obedience sets in deeper, darker contrast our previous disobedience; our deepening consciousness of his mercy makes us more ashamed of having formerly slighted it; and our brightening notions of all his attributes, make us more and more astonished at our infatuated recklessness, which could so long have trifled with them. Thus fresh objects

of repentance are daily rising to the view of the penitent, witnesses of the corruption of heart in which he has been so long sunk, which will continue prophesying to him in sackcloth and in ashes to the last. From them he receives a daily rebuke, from them turns, fully humbled, to supplicate the God of mercies, and the God of mercies each day turns his mourning into joy: the wounds which he now bears being no longer the effect of present sins, but the impression of the sorrowful memory of the past, are the marks which he bears, not of the world, but of Christ in him. From this fear and this love—these two co-relative sources of sorrow and joy—flow all the Christian's graces: from the one, his lowliness, meekness, and charity; from the other, his elevated feelings of hope, fortitude, and thankfulness; and these apparently opposing elements, chastising and curbing here, invigorating and enlarging there, perfect that frame of mind which results from a full and unfeigned repentance,—even from that repentance by which we are admitted to covenanted pardon and peace, in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Consisting, as the process thus described must, of several steps, we need not be surprised if the penitent sometimes stops short in it. We have already seen that the first step of turning away from the world by no means necessarily leads to the next, which is

the turning to God: even when the sinner intends to turn to God, he often mistakes for it his disgust of the world, and contenting himself with this evidence, proceeds no further, but rather in a short time becomes reconciled again to the former minister of his false happiness. And even if he have turned and caught a glimpse of his God, this very glimpse presents in the same moment so long and dark an interval of continued and laborious struggle to attain a full clear light, that he shrinks from the toil; he wilfully deludes himself with the comfortable thought, that having once turned to God he is advancing: and, having admitted a ray of heavenly light into his bosom, he rests upon it as evidence of being in a state of peace with God, instead of proceeding with it as an earnest of more to be obtained. Even thus it too frequently happens that God's summons to repentance is misinterpreted by our self-delusion into an assurance that all is well. We regard it as a signal to go to quarters, and not to march. We look upon it as a certificate of being put into possession, not as a promise that we shall possess. It is to us the setting sun, which tells us that our work is done; not the rising, which tells us that our work must be begun. It is the rainbow, which we may stand and gaze at, and assure ourselves of God's covenant of safety; and not

the cloudy pillar by day, and fiery pillar by night, which we must never cease to follow up.

Again: even after we have turned our face in good earnest (at least, as we think) to God, the distance at which he appears from us, and our consequent despondence, gives a temporary advantage to the world, which is nigh at hand with all its outward cheerfulness. We have now, therefore, for the first time, two masters openly set before us, each calling us to his service: for the first time we are fully aware of the difficulties which beset the road to eternal life: for the first time we become conscious of the exceeding power of the world. We thought not of the strength of its stream while we were carelessly floating with it; but now we have to make head against it, and with difficulty can we keep our footing. What wonder, then, if at this point often occurs a long pause, or even a retrograde step? Here is the crisis of the penitent's fate, but here, likewise, is the assisting grace of God most manifestly shewn, strengthening amid weakness. But for this help our corrupt nature would immediately relapse into its former state, and we should deem the fleeting world, of which we are in occupation, at least an equivalent to the everlasting world, which is in expectance. From the whole process of repentance, thus considered, it is evident that we must

address ourselves to it without delay; it is a work to which the more bodily and mental vigour we can bring on our part, the more certain are we of completing it through God's grace. But not only our limbs and senses are daily becoming less active and pliant, but our minds and thoughts also. Our will is daily losing somewhat of its sovereignty over both one department and the other; and when the trembling hand refuses to obey, the thoughts also will most probably be out of our controul. Thus there is a point where, humanly speaking, repentance is no longer possible. Now, therefore, when it is suggested, is the acceptable time. Now let the holy work begin; and God, that desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live, will save our souls alive.

# SERMON X.

## ON THE STATE OF A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

---

ROM. iv. 3.

*Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

---

IN the moment of the first man's sin, his relation to God was changed. He had disobeyed the will of God, conformity to which constituted the excellence of his nature, and was the only principle of harmony to its various qualities. His original nature was now, like a dead body, in a state of hideous dissolution, from the loss of the vital principle; and discordant passions, unrestrained appetites, broken thoughts, took place of that compact system, in which every part bore without a single deviation to the one grand object. His passions, instead of being excited by the love of God, were now roused by the love of himself; his appetites, instead of finding satisfaction in God's provision for them, sought it anywhere else,

and therefore in earthly things rather than heavenly; his thoughts, instead of centering in the worship and contemplation of God, were scattered abroad, and having lost that converging impulse by which they ascended straight to the throne of heaven, lay, like a fog, entangled amid the briers and brambles of earth. If, therefore, in his former state, he was an object of God's love, what else could he be in his present, but an object of his wrath and condemnation? Nevertheless, such is God's unspeakable mercy, he was met in this miserable state by a promise of restoration. And the effect of that promise on this state, now, alas! the natural state of man, is the object of the present enquiry. It is essential to the nature of a promise, that it can have no retrospect: however suggested by past circumstances, it cannot take them into its conditions. Hence the promise of everlasting life, being proposed by God to man, he is freed from all anxiety regarding his conduct previous to his acceptance of it. The very promise annuls the past, as far as responsibility can be concerned, and assures him that it is irrelative to the great bliss to be conveyed to him. Such a promise is therefore necessarily accompanied with an assurance of the forgiveness of past sins. The acceptance of the promise on the part of man, is through faith in God the giver; this

this being essential on the part of the receiver, in any promise between any parties. This promise also is made by God for the sake of the merits of Jesus Christ, his only son. From these several considerations being put together, there arises the proposition, that our sins are forgiven through faith, for the sake of the merits of Jesus Christ; in other words, we are justified through faith, on account of the merits of Jesus Christ.

And this proposition, having been deduced from principles common to every stage of God's Church, is applicable to every period of it; the only difference will be, that the reason of God's forgiveness is not necessary to be revealed to all men, and therefore its complete development was reserved for that period which he had destined for the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began.—(Rom. xvi. 25.)

The forgiveness of sins thus conveyed to the natural man on his accepting God's promise in faith, is called justification, his injustice up to that moment not being taken into account.

We have now to examine the nature of this faith.

It is a lively and implicit belief in God's promise, nor can man, from the very nature of the case, bring any thing more wherewith to meet God: works, we have seen, are entirely excluded. What, indeed,

could the lost, the degraded, the despairing Adam bring, but an humble and earnest acceptance of whatever God in his mercy should think fit to bestow? What could be the recommendation of Abraham before God, more than a sincere conviction of the truth of his promises, even against all human grounds of hope? and what can the receiver of the Gospel plead but his faith in God through Christ? Works taken into account at this moment, would throw man back again into his condemnation. We are justified, therefore, by faith alone, without works, and the faith of man and the forgiveness of God are correlative terms; and thus, for instance, the Gospel of Christ proclaims remission of sins to all men, of whatever condition, mental, moral, or physical,—to the philosopher and to the ignorant, to the publican and the pharisee, to the man in the king's court, to the beggar on the highway,—to him who hath worked from dawn, and to him who began but at the eleventh hour, provided they will only repent and believe. All, therefore, whatever they may have been before,—by whatever ways, and through whatever length of time they may have arrived at it,—are in this moment held to be equal,—there is no difference between master and slave, Jew and Greek. But however long God's preventing grace may have been pre-disposing the heart to entertain this justify-

ing faith, it is evident that the act of justification is momentary: it is a single point in our life, on one side of which all the past is cancelled, on the other all is future in bright and brilliant hope. It is a moment, as it were, of spiritual re-animation; and as when God recalls from death, he by that very act also necessarily infuses a principle of life, so in this act he not only acquits us from sin, but also infuses a vivifying spirit of holiness. From this circumstance, and also because it is due to the operation of the Holy Ghost, the state ensuing from this moment is called the state of sanctification, and must extend henceforward to our life's end.

Now, since the moment after justification our previous nature, with its thoughts and feelings, still subsists, the relation in which God chooses to consider us, alone having undergone an effective change as yet, and as the Holy Spirit has commenced his operations, and as faith (which waits in hope the accomplishment of the thing promised, but unseen) must still subsist and proceed, we see that not only faith, but works also, must be taken into account in our consideration of this state.

And first with regard to faith.

Every one knows by experience, that the more objects we can lay hold of, and bring together, as it were, to converge to the desired end, the firmer our

assurance in its accomplishment becomes: hence our faith is capable of growth in extent and stability. And indeed, since an active mind is always progressive to some point, if our faith did not grow correspondingly it would soon be overlaid and choaked up by the growth of other faculties and feelings: but the objects thus supplied to the exercise of the faith of the religious man daily grow in number and importance. He has God's holy word, and God's holy spirit to supply them. The latter enlightens his understanding to the study of the former, which, having been also the production of the same spirit, brings him into still closer communion with the giver of light, whose co-operation is still further obtained in meditation and prayer: hence the faith of this man is every day seeing fresh objects to lead him on to the end unseen. He is taking a more and more comprehensive view of the holy word; he is constantly bringing more and more points together to bear to that end, which before seemed unconnected; he is gradually supplying to every communication with the world, a firm base in God's revelation, on which it shall rest like a rock amid the waves, unmoved by wind or tide of human affairs; he is daily providing some new heavenly principle, some new deduction of faith, to support him against trial and temptation; every day he opens his eyes

upon more on which to be humbled, more on which to be thankful, more on which to love, more on which to praise, to sing, and to be joyful. Thus our faith, growing with the number of objects which give it exercise, daily gathering under its dominion more and more of the subjects of thought and passion, advances continually towards that comprehension which shall include all our reflection and practise, and that stability which nothing of this world can shake. It is attaining a protecting omnipresence, as it were, in all the goings forth of our spirit, whether its objects be within or without. While human faculties, such as human knowledge, widen at the expense of depth, this heavenly faculty is given without stint or measure.

This progressive quality of faith is several times mentioned or implied by Scripture. In its least degree it is likened to a grain of mustard-seed (LUKE xvii. 6); but this, though the least of seeds, grows to the greatest tree. Men may be established and grounded in the faith, and may be moved away (COL. i. 23), and faith is the victory which overcometh the world (1 JOHN v. 4).

We may briefly shew the vast extent allowed to the progress of faith, by instancing the difference between a justifying and a sanctifying faith. The one is the result of a comparison of the gifts of the

world with God's promise, and ends in the joyful election of the latter. But the other has entirely dismissed the former from all consideration, and fixes entirely upon the latter. In the one, was an assured expectation of help from God; in the other, is the conscious enjoyment of it, acting as an earnest of more and greater. There, the beginning is in fear; here, the end is in love. There, the seed was sown; here, the fruit is gathered. The number of objects supplied to the nourishment of faith must have grown more numerous as the Church grew in age, which, in this instance, resembles one of its members, whose case we have been considering. The faith of Adam, and his patriarchal successors, must have had its objects, few, and all prospective; nothing, as far as is recorded, having been added to the original promise, which could bring it nearer to the eye, or increase its clearness, until the call of Abraham. If we take the Jewish church at its brightest period, we find that its members had presented to their eyes a bright track, allowing the eye to rest at intervals on brilliant and glorious objects, and yet conducting it on, through an undeviating line, to the accomplishment of the original and general prophecy. The Jew stood here at a point of time up to which, from the delivery of the prophecy, stretched a series of heart-stirring wonders and mercies, shewn to his nation; and

onward from which stretched another series, glittering through the darkness of futurity. At the same time, the voice of living prophets was sounding in his ear, and adding star after star, cluster upon cluster, until he gazed upon a milky way, as it were, of coming events. But how insignificant is even all this, compared with what is presented to the eye of Christian faith. It is indeed the starry night which ushers us in a bright and glorious day. For all which was brilliant vision to the Jew, is to us a body of glorious and substantial facts; our future begins where his ended, and is limited but by the consummation of all things, when our mighty Lord and Saviour shall come again in glory to judge both the quick and the dead. Besides our own peculiar view, we have all which the Patriarch saw in hope, and the Jew in prophecy. It may, perhaps, be objected, that our advantage is not so very great here, inasmuch as our belief is more easily given to a few well-established facts, than to a multitude; that, at all events, a few are sufficient, being as much as the mind can command in its grasp. This would be true, were not the connexion between the facts so close, the tendency of all to one point so clear, that a single term accepted, all the rest follow of course; and then the accumulation pressing upon the mind in every direction, leaves not a single heaving point; not a single expression

of murmuring doubt can escape. Belief will readily admit intervals of other impressions on the mind, and may therefore come from a few facts; but faith is as it were an omnipresence of conviction, flowing from every quarter to which we turn, and for this continual impression requires a continual supply of objects.

To illustrate what we have been saying, let us take up an individual instance; let us consider the progress in faith made by the Christian convert. At the very outset, his faith, by keeping his eye fixed upon his Saviour, would now enable him for the first time to overcome some besetting temptation; for the first time to subdue some tyrannous passion, which had destroyed his peace of conscience. He has here a cheering proof of the efficacy of faith, and his faith is increased; and as he advances from conquest to conquest over the flesh, he also grows from faith to faith. Thus is it with regard to his practice. At the same time, on his applying in his newly-acquired faith to God's holy word, he would there for the first time find something wonderfully corresponding to some particular state of his mind, both vividly suggesting it, and most happily directing it; whether it be some uneasiness which he now finds turned into comfort, or some enjoyment which he now finds exalted and sanctified into

lasting spiritual happiness. And thus while, on every successive reading, he brings different states of mind to it, and receives for each an all-sufficient remedy, or sanctifying direction, his faith grows stronger daily, until the word of God is so inwoven into all his thoughts, is so diffused into the whole frame of his mind, as to be the ruling principle, and not the mere accessory. Thus internally also he grows from faith to faith. Again, every day that he turns over the pages of Scripture, some fact detailed in it strikes him as it never did before; and objects are daily arising to nourish his growing faith in his hours of meditation. And thus at length he attains unto that faith, which is proof to the seductions of the flesh, to the perplexities of the spirit; which, in a word, overcometh the world.

Having ascertained the nature of faith, let us next enquire into its rank and value. It is the fountain-head of every other holy acquirement. Faith in the love of Christ moves our love towards each other. Faith in the help of Christ, and in the life to come, which he bestows, gives us patience to bear, and courage to dare. Faith, holding up our own unworthiness, and his all-sufficient merits, inspires us with gentleness and meekness. Just as a powerful well-head supplies a number of pools below, which serve for heads of water for irrigation,

so does faith supply the forementioned qualities, which give life and vigour to our Christian practice.

It is in constant activity, ever welling forth, and bubbling up, and by a constant supply keeping the pools full against the proper season of their being called upon to perform their part. Possession, therefore, of this can alone give us possession of the rest. On this account it is that sometimes Holy Scripture sums up the whole Gospel under this single term of faith. If all our other Christian qualities are thus dependant upon faith, much more are works, which are the outward expression of those qualities. Faith, therefore, is the main-trunk, these qualities are the branches, works are the fruit. Faith is essential to the very existence of the tree; works are necessary to its value, but accidental to its existence.

But, at the same time, it is with very good reason that the authors of the epistles of the New Testament direct their exhortations not to faith, but rather to works; with provocations to these they overflow. For faith, being the inward principle of exercise to the spirit, as life is of motion to the body, can only be maintained by that exercise. A physician would not say to the sick man, maintain your life, increase your vital powers; but would insist upon using exercise, practising diet. If a body shew neither motion nor speech, it is dead to all purposes

of this world; and so faith without works is dead to all purposes of the spiritual world. But though the supremacy of faith be thus undoubted, such disputes have taken place upon the relative value of works, that the subject cannot be so immediately dismissed, especially as the result is of the utmost importance. It is astonishing what continual mistakes and misunderstandings in moral questions arise from inattention to the definite sense of words. While every one is eager in the use of general terms, scarcely any one is patient enough to ascertain their full meaning. We have a strong instance of this in the use of the term "good works." How many have defined to themselves their acceptation of the word "good" here?

Good works may be so termed in two ways. First, they may be called good, because they have resulted from the natural principle of right reason, recognised by us individually and socially; in this sense they are good according to the moral philosopher. But in a second sense they are good, as proceeding from a conscience informed by God's revealed will. In this sense only are they good, according to the theologian; for it is clear that the Christian who works upon the first principle, who is dutiful, affectionate, charitable, merely from natural motives, so far from obeying God, is disobeying

him. God tells him to act from this motive, and he chooses to act from that. The confusion of these two different principles of action is the rock upon which heedless and mere professing Christians are perpetually striking. They imagine themselves to have performed God's will, when they have not taken the trouble to learn it; to have pleased him, when they have but pleased themselves; and mistake the applause of man for the approval of God.

But among those who understand the term in its proper sense, there are unfortunate disputes as to what title we should give them in expressing their relation to our spiritual condition. The only opinions which need be canvassed here are two; namely, that which entitles their exhibition a condition of salvation, and that which calls them the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith. Between the well-informed propounders of these opinions, the difference appears to be rather nominal than real. But not so among their less considerate followers; they are led more by words than things. It becomes us therefore to make our election between these two modes of expression. The first appears deficient in logical precision upon so critical a doctrine; for it includes in its terms two propositions, which, while it is most necessary to distinguish them from each other, thus come confounded to the

understanding of the unexploring reader. It tells us, not only that if we have not works we shall not be saved, but also, that if we have works we shall be saved; and in this latter sense, which commends itself so much to our self-sufficiency, it is very generally accepted by the careless and unreflecting; to them it expresses little, if anything, less than the doctrine of merits. But neither, if we confine the expression to the first of these included propositions, will it give a clear statement of the fact; for it confounds the sense of the word condition. The condition of salvation is purely conventional, being the merits of Christ on the part of God, faith on the part of man. But here the condition is necessary, and moreover subordinate to the other, since the expression, when fully explained, must be intended to say that, if we are to be saved, we must have faith, (where the condition is one of convention:) and that if we have faith it must produce works, (where the condition is a moral necessity.) In whichever way, therefore, we resolve the general proposition of the exhibition of works being a condition of salvation, there is ground for misapprehension, and its employers cannot complain of misrepresentation. The second mode of expression, therefore, seems preferable; and both boasting and despondency, which may arise from differently misunderstanding

the first, are excluded. Boasting cannot have place, because the man, whose lively faith is the author of the work, has in his contemplation such attributes of perfection, even of the Father, whom he sees in his son Jesus Christ who hath declared him,—such justice, such holiness; and turns from these to find in his own best frame of mind such an humiliating contrast; is so continually rebuked by the comparison of what he has done with what he should have done; descries such a wide interval even between the will and the deed, imperfect as the former is, and again between the means given to him, and the end produced by him, that he will indeed confess with all confusion of face that he is an unprofitable servant. But despondency will be excluded, not only because his lively faith has a lively apprehension of God's mercy, but also because his works, embodying though they do much sad fleshly superfluity together with his principles of faith, will be evidences to him of the abiding of God's grace in his heart; and although they bear no proportion to the model which he has in view, no more than finite to infinite, yet they admit of degrees among each other; and if the progress towards perfection be indiscernible as ever, yet the remoteness from helpless human corruption begins to be visible. His tree at all events is bearing fruit;

it is in the heavenly vineyard, it is tended by the heavenly vinedresser, and the earnest which it has given of answering his care will earn still more of his attention; grace will be given for grace; the very discovery of his deficiencies will administer comfort in the same moment that they abash him: for when a man has found out where he is weak, he has also found out where he may hereafter be less weak; and from the corruption of man he is enabled to estimate more distinctly, by contrast, the power of the amending grace of God; and hence he feels assured that sufficient shall be supplied to his overcoming the world.

Good works, therefore, are the fruits of a lively faith, and are acceptable to God, as the fruit of the tree to the Father, which has been planted by the husbandry of his only begotten Son. Holy he accounts the vineyard, holy the tree, and holy the fruit; if it continue to bear fruit, the care of the husbandman is both continued and increased. If it bear not fruit, it is cut down, cast out of the vineyard, and burned. But as the ploughman who looks back is not fit for the kingdom of heaven, so neither must we be casting fond retrospects upon our works, and thus resting in them with all complacency: we must be ever looking forward, and what has been done must be but a call to do more; grace

supplied must lead to grace to be supplied. Hence a diligent examination of our state is necessary, and here it is that our good works tell practically as evidences to us of our state towards salvation. This will appear from an examination of the proper tests of our faith. They are from within and from without.

I. The testimony from within is peace of mind, being borne by our conscience, and in three different ways.

First: It will come from the understanding; and this, when well examined, gives the surest evidence of all, because it is that part of us, which, from its remote and abstract nature, is least likely to be imposed upon by the outward world, and its passions. The force of this testimony will consist in the absence of all doubt and perplexity, in the entertainment of clear and consistent views, in quick discernment of consequences, in most full and reasonable conviction of the principles of belief, which it has attained by long and patient investigation, and in a mastery over its sacred subjects, so as to be ever ready to produce and apply them as the practice of life shall demand them. No man can have confidence in the steadiness of his faith, without the answer of some such touchstone as this.

Secondly: It will consist in purity and propriety of imagination, by which I mean not only the pre-

sence of nothing but pure images in the mind, but also proper, and adequate, and abiding. Is our notion of God sufficiently exalted; is our view of the gospel, with all its facts, consistent with Scripture? Is the character of Christ written in all its true holiness and loveliness on our breast? Are the mighty events by which he wrought our redemption, pictured there in true, lively, and abiding characters; cheering us, and prompting us as models by which to shape our own conduct? Do these holy pictures, drawn after long study of their heavenly prototypes, touch after touch, by perusal after perusal of Scripture, still grow day after day into greater likeness and harmony with the originals, which day after day we turn over? Do we hail them with increasing delight, and patiently proceed comparing, improving, amending, until the glorious whole be formed in us? In proportion as we have repelled all impure, low, trivial, and earthly imaginations, and possessed ourselves with pure, lofty, serious, and heavenly, we have acquired a saving faith, and are enjoying the beneficial co-operation of the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly: it will come from our passions and feelings, and will consist in the absence of all vexation; in the consciousness of daily gaining some victory over them; in the resignation of all our

desires into God's hands; in the looking on the world with the calmness of one who sees in each event, however it may affect him, even to extreme poverty and affliction, one harbinger more of the coming of the kingdom of Christ; to whom and to whose cause he has surrendered himself in every wish and appetite, and can cry out, joyful amid sorrow, like a zealous imitator of the obedience of his Saviour, "Not my will, O Lord, but thy will be done." In proportion as we thus can overcome the world, and establish the kingdom of heaven over our hearts, will be the value of the testimony arising from this source. Before, however, proceeding to the next class, we must observe, that not very many men are possessed of sufficient reflection, and of such steady attention to the working of their own minds, as to draw much advantage from the above sources. Only the higher and most carefully disciplined minds can apply to them. The rest will, except under very pressing circumstances which concentrate their attention on some particular occasion, cast a look so superficial, that they will not be aware (at least from these means) how vanity is deluding their understanding, enthusiasm abusing their imagination, and interest working upon their passions. To these, therefore, that is, to the great generality of man-

kind, a surer test is afforded from sources of the next class. Happy indeed is he who can make good use of both!

II. The value of the testimony, from without, that is, of works, arises from their being a palpable expression of our frame of mind, the final result of the thoughts and passions which we have been cherishing there. And it tells us of two things: first, whether we be really possessed of certain inward qualities, for which we give ourselves credit; and secondly, brings to light qualities which we had not suspected in ourselves.

On the first point we may remark how prone we are to give ourselves credit for certain gifts of nature; for calmness of mind, contentedness of spirit, evenness of temper. But it is plain that unless we can exhibit to our conscience outward proofs of these being put into exercise, not by the dictates of nature, but by the motive of faith, they are of no account, but rather the contrary: we have received talents which we have never sought to improve, and turn to the service of our Master. From faith alone can we receive the energy to overcome the lets and hindrances, with which all natural gifts are, as with means of proof and trial, accompanied. With the above-mentioned gifts are generally found also reluctance to exertion, passiveness to the authority

and advice of others, fear of contradiction. So also fortitude of mind is often joined with an unevangelical stubbornness; cautiousness of belief, with scepticism; curiosity of enquiry, with barren and minute trifling. Faith alone will free the gift from its countervailing partner, and bring it unfettered and energetic into action; and so brought, it will give us a testimony of the spirit abiding within us.

On the second point we need not observe how ignorant men are of themselves, not only through passion and interest, not only through inattention, but also from incapacity of passing judgment upon their inward thoughts. Such a mingled mass is the mind of almost every man, consisting of thoughts and passions of manifold complexions, of manifold stages from mere confused elements to ripe matured notions, that they seldom know its general bearing before it gives birth to some work. Then, indeed, the deformity which escaped them in the dark depths of their bosom is seen clearly in the light before men. Then the laws and the customs of the world, and the word of Scripture, immediately bring it to their bar, and the whole man is judged from this single fact. His works then tried in the conscience of the believer, will give him an evidence, which otherwise he could not obtain, of the spirit within him. The approval or condemnation of the world will only operate to his examining it with greater and

more scrupulous jealousy by the test of God's word; and according as it is agreeable to that test he may reckon his sincerity of faith.

Such are the testimonies from within and from without, which the Christian has of his spiritual state, and to these he must be daily appealing: they mark distinctly out the way which he is going, and he can see whether it tend to the only proper end or not. The proof of the accuracy of his examination will be the accordance of the testimony from within and from without, in both cases subjected to the word of God, that searcher of the heart. If both agree in telling him that he is advancing in grace, most happy he, and the effusion of the spirit upon his heart will give him still further assurance and faith in God, and his Son Jesus Christ, even as the dew on the fleece of wool did to Gideon of old (JUDGES vii. 37). And finally he will obtain that faith which overcometh the world, and enjoy its crowning triumph, which is, to have transferred himself in hope and affections above: and as in the body he puts full faith in the permanency of the operations of Providence; pursues his plans on the full assurance of the sun rising on the morrow, of the sea maintaining its level, of the earth yielding its increase; even so, even with the same certainty, to

work in spirit, convinced that the grace of God shall never fail, that the help of his knowledge shall ever abide, that the bliss and glory of the life to come shall keep the appointed day, when the Son of Man shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the quick and the dead.

# SERMON XI.

## ON THE ANALOGY OF THE NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

1 PETER i. 23.

*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

To be born again of God and of the Spirit, to be begotten by the word and through the gospel, to put off the old man and put on the new, to become as little children, to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord, to come unto the perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,—these are phrases which are continually meeting our eyes in the pages of Holy Scripture; and it were well if their pregnant meaning as often found its way to our hearts. They are indeed figurative; but it is only by means of illustration, drawn from the world of flesh, that our imperfect nature can obtain a glimpse of the objects and operations of the world of spirit; and they convey to us as clearly as our

duties and condition here can require, the important fact, that we have to undergo a moral death, the death unto sin,—and a moral birth, the birth unto righteousness; and that there is a strong analogy between the birth and growth of the body and that of the spirit, so that we may learn from the one to ascertain, with sufficient precision, the progressive stages of the other.

As this analogy (which it is now purposed to pursue) is intelligible only so far as our consciousness carries us, it will be sufficient to commence it from that moment, when God, by some one among his many merciful interventions with sinful man, calls him from a state of worldly thoughtlessness to a serious consideration of his spiritual condition; and from a secure and almost unconscious enjoyment of mere initiatory spiritual privileges, to their actual and full exercise. That moment is, perhaps, with some, but too transitory, and the creature dies almost in the birth; others expire in the rudiments of childhood; some, alas! in the prime of manhood; some, after a long struggle with infirmity, start into health, and illustrate the analogy to its full extent, and to their own salvation, and the glory of their master.

Let us take the natural world, and contemplate the young child. Observe his intense curiosity, his unwearied, minute, and detailed examination of the

new world around him. He will not be satisfied with the distant evidence of sight, hereafter to be his principal guide; but he must touch, taste, handle, and thus is forming that correctness of vision, whereby he may in future judge of what lies beyond his reach. Such is the new man, upon his first introduction into the spiritual world. Besides what is peculiar to it, all that detail which before surrounded him, but scarcely could engage his attention, now, invested with a new character, solicits his observation, at every moment, from every quarter. All that train of consequences which flow so abundantly from the sinfulness of man, from the mercy, love, and justice of God, from a crucified Redeemer, and the certainty of everlasting life,—all that is delivered line by line, and page by page, in God's holy word,—all the hourly duties of life, which are now become the palpable dress of spiritual meditation and feelings,—all the opportunities which his clear sight now perceives thrusting themselves upon his notice, coming from God, like his daily bread, to try and nourish his young faculties,—all these fill his sphere of thought and action to overflow, attract him by their novelty, invite him by their grandeur to examine, and compare, and spiritually handle. His ardent curiosity will let nothing pass before him, merely as an object of sight; he must take in hand and prove all things, and cleave to that

supplied must lead to grace to be supplied. Hence a diligent examination of our state is necessary, and here it is that our good works tell practically as evidences to us of our state towards salvation. This will appear from an examination of the proper tests of our faith. They are from within and from without.

I. The testimony from within is peace of mind, being borne by our conscience, and in three different ways.

First: It will come from the understanding; and this, when well examined, gives the surest evidence of all, because it is that part of us, which, from its remote and abstract nature, is least likely to be imposed upon by the outward world, and its passions. The force of this testimony will consist in the absence of all doubt and perplexity, in the entertainment of clear and consistent views, in quick discernment of consequences, in most full and reasonable conviction of the principles of belief, which it has attained by long and patient investigation, and in a mastery over its sacred subjects, so as to be ever ready to produce and apply them as the practice of life shall demand them. No man can have confidence in the steadiness of his faith, without the answer of some such touchstone as this.

Secondly: It will consist in purity and propriety of imagination, by which I mean not only the pre-

sence of nothing but pure images in the mind, but also proper, and adequate, and abiding. Is our notion of God sufficiently exalted; is our view of the gospel, with all its facts, consistent with Scripture? Is the character of Christ written in all its true holiness and loveliness on our breast? Are the mighty events by which he wrought our redemption, pictured there in true, lively, and abiding characters; cheering us, and prompting us as models by which to shape our own conduct? Do these holy pictures, drawn after long study of their heavenly prototypes, touch after touch, by perusal after perusal of Scripture, still grow day after day into greater likeness and harmony with the originals, which day after day we turn over? Do we hail them with increasing delight, and patiently proceed comparing, improving, amending, until the glorious whole be formed in us? In proportion as we have repelled all impure, low, trivial, and earthly imaginations, and possessed ourselves with pure, lofty, serious, and heavenly, we have acquired a saving faith, and are enjoying the beneficial co-operation of the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly: it will come from our passions and feelings, and will consist in the absence of all vexation; in the consciousness of daily gaining some victory over them; in the resignation of all our

desires into God's hands; in the looking on the world with the calmness of one who sees in each event, however it may affect him, even to extreme poverty and affliction, one harbinger more of the coming of the kingdom of Christ; to whom and to whose cause he has surrendered himself in every wish and appetite, and can cry out, joyful amid sorrow, like a zealous imitator of the obedience of his Saviour, "Not my will, O Lord, but thy will be done." In proportion as we thus can overcome the world, and establish the kingdom of heaven over our hearts, will be the value of the testimony arising from this source. Before, however, proceeding to the next class, we must observe, that not very many men are possessed of sufficient reflection, and of such steady attention to the working of their own minds, as to draw much advantage from the above sources. Only the higher and most carefully disciplined minds can apply to them. The rest will, except under very pressing circumstances which concentrate their attention on some particular occasion, cast a look so superficial, that they will not be aware (at least from these means) how vanity is deluding their understanding, enthusiasm abusing their imagination, and interest working upon their passions. To these, therefore, that is, to the great generality of man-

kind, a surer test is afforded from sources of the next class. Happy indeed is he who can make good use of both!

II. The value of the testimony, from without, that is, of works, arises from their being a palpable expression of our frame of mind, the final result of the thoughts and passions which we have been cherishing there. And it tells us of two things: first, whether we be really possessed of certain inward qualities, for which we give ourselves credit; and secondly, brings to light qualities which we had not suspected in ourselves.

On the first point we may remark how prone we are to give ourselves credit for certain gifts of nature; for calmness of mind, contentedness of spirit, evenness of temper. But it is plain that unless we can exhibit to our conscience outward proofs of these being put into exercise, not by the dictates of nature, but by the motive of faith, they are of no account, but rather the contrary: we have received talents which we have never sought to improve, and turn to the service of our Master. From faith alone can we receive the energy to overcome the lets and hindrances, with which all natural gifts are, as with means of proof and trial, accompanied. With the above-mentioned gifts are generally found also reluctance to exertion, passiveness to the authority

and advice of others, fear of contradiction. So also fortitude of mind is often joined with an unevangelical stubbornness; cautiousness of belief, with scepticism; curiosity of enquiry, with barren and minute trifling. Faith alone will free the gift from its countervailing partner, and bring it unfettered and energetic into action; and so brought, it will give us a testimony of the spirit abiding within us.

On the second point we need not observe how ignorant men are of themselves, not only through passion and interest, not only through inattention, but also from incapacity of passing judgment upon their inward thoughts. Such a mingled mass is the mind of almost every man, consisting of thoughts and passions of manifold complexions, of manifold stages from mere confused elements to ripe matured notions, that they seldom know its general bearing before it gives birth to some work. Then, indeed, the deformity which escaped them in the dark depths of their bosom is seen clearly in the light before men. Then the laws and the customs of the world, and the word of Scripture, immediately bring it to their bar, and the whole man is judged from this single fact. His works then tried in the conscience of the believer, will give him an evidence, which otherwise he could not obtain, of the spirit within him. The approval or condemnation of the world will only operate to his examining it with greater and

more scrupulous jealousy by the test of God's word; and according as it is agreeable to that test he may reckon his sincerity of faith.

Such are the testimonies from within and from without, which the Christian has of his spiritual state, and to these he must be daily appealing: they mark distinctly out the way which he is going, and he can see whether it tend to the only proper end or not. The proof of the accuracy of his examination will be the accordance of the testimony from within and from without, in both cases subjected to the word of God, that searcher of the heart. If both agree in telling him that he is advancing in grace, most happy he, and the effusion of the spirit upon his heart will give him still further assurance and faith in God, and his Son Jesus Christ, even as the dew on the fleece of wool did to Gideon of old (JUDGES vii. 37). And finally he will obtain that faith which overcometh the world, and enjoy its crowning triumph, which is, to have transferred himself in hope and affections above: and as in the body he puts full faith in the permanency of the operations of Providence; pursues his plans on the full assurance of the sun rising on the morrow, of the sea maintaining its level, of the earth yielding its increase; even so, even with the same certainty, to

he cannot assign his reasons for it; and demand in return, of the man of argument, why he turns away from a precipice, avoids a raging torrent, shuns a devouring fire. We may be assured that whenever reasoning is employed to stifle this internal protest, whether from ourselves or from others, it is supplied by the father of lies; is a net laid for our feet by the unwearied craft of the enemy of our salvation, who would willingly quench the life-giving spirit within us, and reduce us once more to the mortal bondage of the flesh.

Again, our spiritual creation is not independent, like that of our body, of any previous existence. It presupposes all along the ruder elements of our moral nature; and before we can acquire new principles peculiar to the spiritual world, such as maintain our intercourse with the sensible must have been moulded anew, received a different bias, taken another channel.

We have not only to learn, but to unlearn, and one of the most delightful feelings with which God rewards our spiritual improvement, is the discovery at length of a task which can satisfy our noblest faculties,—one in which alone we find them to act in perfect unison with concentrated effect, and this our complicated mental frame, to shew forth all the harmony designed by the hand of its Creator. It is a feeling analogous to that of manhood, when it finds the

proper direction and combined effect of those powers which had been lavished separately, and without object, on the trifles of childhood. For example:—the Christian who had formerly found, as he thought, his powers of understanding so vigorous, so acute, so suitably employed in the questions of policy, literature, or science, discovers now that they were coarse, blunt, inadequate, and unsuitably employed, compared with those to which, in the service of the spirit, they have now ripened, when his judgment has grown up to that intuitive and exquisite discernment of God's will, that nice selection amid the daily mass of occasions placed before him of what shall contribute best to his own spiritual health, and most redound to the honour and glory of his Saviour; setting apart, with unhesitating distinction, profitable from unprofitable, holy from unholy, lasting from fleeting, what is of God from what is of man; when his power of abstraction is spent no longer on unpractical dreams, but grasps real spiritual essences; when his foresight pushes far beyond the boundaries of life; and when his power of attention has become an absorption, by which he can shake off at will the distracting intrusion of the world.

Meanwhile, the power of imagination, that fruitful source of virtue and crime, of joy and sorrow, controlled now in its course by those improved

powers, fastens upon what is pure, turns away from from what is impure. It draws out before him, in visible series, God's mercies and dealings with mankind; it brings home to his heart all that is detailed in Holy Scripture, of his suffering and triumphant Saviour; embodies his holy attributes, renders sensible his presence, and continually holds up to his mind that which it is his prime object to realize, the model of the Christian character; depicturing all his graces and acquirements, suggesting his pure and unworldly sentiments, his towering thoughts, his unceasing homage to God, unwearied charity to man, his meekness, patience, hope, fortitude, and presenting his crown of everlasting glory, and the peace of the world to come.

Similar, too, is the improvement of his affections, which being, in the first instance, generated and nurtured by healthy exercise upon their proper objects on earth, and thence lifted up to God, their final object, in whom alone they find their craving satisfied, and object permanent, return upon the objects of daily duty, endued with a constancy superior to all caprice of chance or change, founded upon a new and unfailing basis. The Christian loves, for Christ loved him; forgives, for through Christ he was forgiven; is humble, for he is a fellow in sin; is charitable, for he is a brother in redemption; is

patient, for he is an heir of salvation. Even the commonest gifts and qualities grow up into estimable Christian graces; passive good nature is exalted into active charity, sanguine temper into lively hope, flow of spirits into angelic cheerfulness, diffidence into humility, a quiet spirit into fortitude, contentment into devotion.

Thus, from his communion with the spiritual world, the Christian comes as from the presence of God, with his faculties refined and affections purified, carrying into the world of flesh around him, like Moses from the mountain, traces of the high communion in which he has been engaged. But his illumination is not of the face, but of the mind; not to be done away, but introductory to greater.

Such are a few of the coincidences which may be brought forward to illustrate the analogy of the growth of body and spirit, the Holy Ghost supplying a continual inspiration of life to its creature, just as the Creator supplies the breath of his nostrils to the man. It is difficult perhaps to pursue such an analogy far, without inadvertently falling into the error of describing spiritual operations as too much allied to corporeal; and much caution is required in drawing deductions from metaphorical illustrations, where the line of correct doctrine can be kept only by incessant reference to other considerations, which

haste, or the natural fondness of pushing an analogy, is too apt to overlook. None, however, will dispute the conclusion, that spiritual amendment must be a work of time. Its commencement, indeed, must, like our birth into the sensible world, be momentary, whether it be referred to our entrance by baptism into the Church of the Christ and God, or to the first awakening impression of spiritual things upon the worldly-minded heart. But we may as well expect the perfect man to issue from his mother's womb, as conceive the Christian to be completely formed in the instant of his first turning his heart from the world to God. Were we to proceed with the analogy, we should conclude, inasmuch as the nobler creature is longer in arriving at maturity, and as the creature thus born admits neither of old age nor of death, that the spiritual man was longer in forming than the natural. Not, however, to insist upon this, it must be borne in mind that there is a long process to be undergone before a positive growth in spirit can be said to commence: previous affections must be weaned, passions subdued, faculties diverted from a wrong channel. And, moreover, let it be remembered, that the full measure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is not poured upon the mind at once: it is distributed by successive portions, increasing in proportion to what is already main-

tained and turned to its proper account there. For, as our Lord himself says, "To him that hath shall much be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away, even what he hath."

Great, therefore, on every consideration, is the danger of procrastination, and even to speak of the past in the solemn phrase of lost moments never to be recovered, is to express but half of the melancholy truth. For every one of these moments, however swift of foot, or light of burden, has left its impression for good or for evil upon the mind, according to its state, clean or unclean; just as the same outward impressions which bring health to healthy organs, but aggravate the disease of the unhealthy. There is no middle point: if we go not forward, we go backward; if we be not standing, we are falling; if we be not in health, we are in decay. Do we delay on the idea of being able to commence the work of religious amendment, and start into newness of life, at will? Every consideration is opposed to an idea confessedly so absurd, and yet so commonly acted upon. It is indeed a strong proof of our delusion, that, with the analogy of the body before our eyes, and that body too, often suffering for the sins of the mind, we should think to resume our moral health at pleasure: that while months, and even years, of painful and cautious regimen, are

often necessary to re-establish the one, a few hurried days are at all times sufficient for the restoration of the other. That wound, and bruise, and putrifying sore, which for the best part of life have been cankering and eating into the mind, shall cease at once their horrid repast, upon the bare expression of our wish for health, and sorrow for their origin.

The human mind, however inattentive we may be to its operations, is all along growing up towards a certain system: feelings are becoming rooted, thoughts are interlacing one with another, according to some predominant principle, which at last, assuming sovereign sway, excludes all such as will not bend to the general organization which it has established. If this principle, therefore, have nothing in common with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it will in the end effectually exclude all sense of its necessity, and almost of its existence; and if it be not actually the Gospel of Christ, it will admit but of partial views of that which we ought to comprehend as a whole. Languor and listlessness are the consequence, and repeated stumbling, from ignorance and carelessness, makes us disgusted with the road which has been pointed out. We are blaming in our hearts the severity of God, when we have to complain only of our own want of energy; and accusing the niggardness of light, which our earnest and sincere

exertion is, according to his holy promise, assured of obtaining in satisfying fulness.

It is in perfect accordance with this narrowness of view, to sit down in idle expectation of some peculiar summons to begin upon the work of newness of life, as if all had not been summoned by their acquaintance with that Gospel, in the very front of which it is written,—" Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" as if all required that palpable interference which called the apostle of the Gentiles to his vast and extraordinary charge. But have they indeed had no call? Has God never been challenging their attention amid the multifarious incidents which he has strewn in their daily course, and the many desires or reluctances with which he has informed their spirit? Have they no remembrance of resolutions formed from time to time, none of hours of repentance, none of hours of hope, none of hours of that holy calm which instantly overspreads the bosom when it has formed some pious determination? All these were consequent upon some call of God, and are evidences that he has not been forgetful of them. But if they pass by such as these, in expectation of something more rousing, more special, of what nature may we reasonably conclude that to be which they await so complacently? God's ordinary dealings with man lead us to presume that it will come

in the shape of some overwhelming visitation, which shall scatter their habitual frame of thought to the winds, dissevering all their usual links, and turning them with their affections from earth, weeping and dropping blood like the fabled myrtle; so that all being once again disentangled, they may grow together anew according to a new principle, which is Christ in the mind and in the heart. O, let no one wait for such a call as this to his duty!

* We have now but just advanced within the commencement of one of those revolutions of time by which we number the days of our sojourn upon earth; a period upon which the most careless are accustomed to bestow some reflections;—for who can avoid throwing back a look upon days now parted for ever, and upon time which can never be recovered? Happy he who, in his present state of mind and practice, can find substantial records of past moments: to him, though bodily, they are not spiritually, past; they have an indissoluble link with the future,—they are the palpable earnest of eternal life,—the first-fruits, picked here and there, of an abundant harvest. Far different, indeed, is he whose retrospect is but a dream of barren thoughts and idle pursuits, where all is in wild disorder without the

* This Sermon was preached on the first Sunday of the year.

one grand object to unite them, and runs from the grasp of memory as freely as the sands of the hour-glass which have measured those precious moments. To him may well be addressed the words of the apostle,—"Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," for he has been indeed sleeping; and the dreamer has been indulging, amid darkness and night, in fantastic and unbridled thoughts; he has been enjoying a world of his own, where he himself has been creator, and not God,—where all has gone according to his own capricious imagination, and the will of God has found no place; the sights and sounds of God's world have been excluded, and he has wasted the precious moments, reckless of place, insensible to the lapse of time, holding converse with unsubstantial beings, expending his affections upon fleeting shadows.

"Life is a dream," said the natural man. Let no Christian account of it so; for it is to him a time allotted by God for beginning and completing a most momentous work,—a work which is sufficient to fill up every part of it, to whatever length it may be extended,—which requires the ardour of youth, the steadiness of manhood, and the caution of old age. Let him not, therefore, defer an employment, the very commencement of which becomes daily more

unsuitable to his years, and be like the tree which, when it should be bearing fruit, is but blossoming; for thus the very purpose of life will be eluded, and a work, whose difficulties demand the pride and bloom of the faculties, will be first imposed upon them in their decay; and what requires unabated vigour, unwearied watchfulness, unexhausted spirits, will be reserved for a bed of sickness or decline of years, seasons of languor, indifference, and irresolution. True it is, that highly-gifted men have before now spoken in fond and complacent anticipation of setting apart some work, as the suitable employment and fit solace of their old age. But how different was the nature of that work from that which we have in contemplation. That was a work pleasingly associated with the past, not anxiously connected with the prospect of the future; it was a natural confirmation of previous habits, not a violent alteration; it was an amusement, not a toil; a minister to the mind, of pleasure, and not of pangs.

To-day, therefore, while it is called to-day, the work should commence. Who knows what impediments the morrow may bring? It may bring friends to delude, or enemies to confound; it may introduce calamity to bewilder our senses, sickness to paralyze our exertions, or death to cut short at once our miserable vacillation.

Each day, as it successively becomes to-day, is all that we can call our own: let us make it truly God's too, by dedicating it to his service, in sincere endeavours, by newness of life here, to realize the promise of everlasting life in the world to come, which he has given us in Christ Jesus our Saviour.

# SERMON XII.

## ON THE REWARD OF OBEDIENCE.

LUKE xxiv. 21.

*But we trusted that it should have been he which should have redeemed Israel.*

A PRIZE no less than everlasting happiness is proposed to the endeavours of man when he diligently seeks God. We have already seen that the expectation of this, which is so necessary both to engage him in the struggle of well-doing in the first instance, and to support him in it ever afterwards, was held forth from the very beginning of the Church; and Scripture assures us that it was earnestly cherished by Enoch, by Job, by Abraham,* by Moses,—testimony being also born to the latter in a very remarkable passage (MATTH. xxii. 31) by the great Bishop of our souls himself,—and in short distinctly informs us that it was a doctrine of the Patriarchal and Jewish church. †

* See Hebr. xi. 5, 10, 13, 14, 24.

† Ib. 39, &c. The whole chapter is opposed to Bishop Warburton's paradox.

From the first to the last prophecy, the ground of this hope is laid in a Redeemer to come; but the way in which God drew the attention of the members of his church upon it is different.

On that second apostacy of man, which drew on the dreadful visitation of the flood, God treated him as a creature in a still lower state of degradation; he dealed with him as with a wayward child, who is to be won to obedience by cates and delicacies, and not, as with a man, by cogency of reason. Man's spiritual sight had become so dim, that he could not look on to the distant prospect of another life, without some middle point. To the original promise, therefore, of everlasting happiness, still remembered, he added that of temporal bliss, so that the completion of the one promise may remind and assure him of the certainty of the other also; that the taste of blissfulness, however fleeting, yet coming expressly from God, might lead his infant appetites to appreciate the promised happiness which should endure for ever, and that the toils and delays which are rewarded by the one may give him experience, and render him patient, long-suffering, unbroken in hope, under the still more serious difficulties to be encountered, through a still longer interval of suspense in the course of attaining the other. Hence Noah was both assured against a

repetition of the calamity of the flood, and at the same time comforted with promises of fruitfulness and increase. As apostacy revives and increases, God at length interferes again, and deals with man as reduced a degree lower still. For under the Jewish dispensation, a grand feature of which was the settling that chosen people in a land flowing with milk and honey, so completely is the promise directed to temporal things, that we need not wonder why that carnal people, in despite of their prophets continually recalling them to the original and universal spiritual promise, should have fondly imagined that themselves were the end, and not the vehicle, and that the magnificent series of words and deeds proposed by God to their ear and eye referred but to their own national aggrandizement. Of this prevailing state of feeling we have a signal example in the words of the text, which come to us with peculiar interest as being uttered by men whose lives, being partly under the old dispensation and partly under the new, (of which themselves, under Christ, were founders,) exhibited in the first all the pride and carnality of the Jew, in the second, all the charity and spirituality of the Christian. These eminent and godly persons were among the first who grew up from the childhood, under which mankind was formerly considered in God's dealings, to the

manhood of the Gospel, under which consideration we are now treated.

This manner of God's dealing with his chosen people will appear more peculiar and distinct, if we refer to the situation of the Gentiles. They had lost the original promise, or only knew it by a tradition so faint and so corrupt, that its influence was completely lost upon their moral conduct. They had no reward proposed to their obedience in this life, or in the next. What a contrast do they present to the people of God, even taking these latter at their very lowest degradation! In them we see to what our nature was indeed reduced by Adam's transgression, before yet it was raised again from the dust by God's gracious promise. Though he had lost both the possession and expectation of perfect happiness, man had still the appetite for it. So far from satisfying him, every enjoyment administered a craving for one more intense still; and while the beast lay down satisfied after his meal, and reckless of the future, man in his happiest moments was unhappy still, for he was still unsatisfied. In vain the philosopher sought the chief good, advanced from a bright to a brighter; still something remained behind to attain, and of that he in vain attempted to ascertain the nature. The search led him into a dim and tangled region, and there left him in miserable perplexity.

Thus was the Jew, in his temporal blessings, continually rebuked for his unmindfulness of the great spiritual blessing, and the Heathen abandoned to his ignorance of both, when, in the fulness of time, the original spiritual promise given to Adam, was accomplished in Jesus Christ. The restoration of man was now accomplished; a new heaven and a new earth had been created, and man also morally created anew in the second Adam. The life to come, with all its preparatory means, had been actually exemplified before the eyes of the world. Man, therefore, henceforward needed no intermediate object to draw him on; he rested at once upon the great end, which was now near, certain, and continually in sight. In this change of circumstances, can we wonder that the order of the objects of our aim is reversed, so that when any temporal blessing is pronounced, it is merely by the way, and quite accidental to the spiritual one; that we should be told to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then all these things shall be added unto us; and that while their expectation of spiritual good should be fed and maintained by the experience of temporal good, so our consciousness of possession should be proved by the trial of temporary evil? Here, indeed, lies one great point of contrast; here the spirituality of our dispensation is peculiarly

shown. Where temporal blessings are a reward, and therefore temporal afflictions are naturally looked upon as a punishment, man, who is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward, must have felt as under continual bondage. He must ever be either suffering the scourge, or in continual apprehension of it. And though, as appears from Scripture, good men had imbibed, through God's revelation, proper and spiritual notions on the nature of affliction, yet this did not accord with the deduction generally drawn from the law, and was rather the easing of the yoke to a favoured few, than the removal of it from any one. The very promise of the Holy Land, had been accompanied with threats of expulsion; and as that was the title to all his joy, so would these impart a character to affliction. If one was the reward of obedience, the other was the punishment of disobedience. When, too, the Jew looked to his history for the comfort of examples of affliction, if it presented him the instance of Job, for this one it gave him many others of a very different character. It offered to him Sampson, Eli, Saul, and David, all suffering for heavy transgressions, and bearing in their body the marks of the scourge of divine vengeance. But now to us Christians, since temporal blessings are but accidentally our reward, of course bodily sufferings are but accidentally our

punishment; and in the greater number of instances can be regarded but as the turning away of our face from the importunate allurement of temporal enjoyment to the contemplation of spiritual; as the call given to inattention,—as the warnings to consider the fleeting state of all around,—as the race to be run before winning the crown,—as the refining fire whence the saint issues forth as pure and undrossed gold. Therefore they have been proclaimed to us in company with our everlasting inheritance, by him who said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." They are not a hindrance, but a preparation. And therefore where Noah was promised the fatness of the earth, and Abraham enjoyed its inheritance, we are warned to expect its toils and miseries; where they were bound closer to earth, we are rudely shaken from it; where they were bidden to go to its enjoyment, we are sent to its denial. To us the world is indeed crucified, nor have we to reck either of its blessings or its sorrows, excepting in so far as we regard them as vehicles of grace; as furnishing that state, and affording that scope of action, without which the Christian character cannot be developed. There is no soldier where there is no war, and no victory where there is no battle. Then if we look round for companions in affliction, the very first who presents himself is

the great Captain of our salvation; and we are amid the throng of the holy army of martyrs, and all the elect of the Church of Christ. What need indeed have we of any pledge supplied by bodily blessings, we who have a pledge so much more palpable, so much more accordant with our state of spiritual manhood; a pledge in the earnest of the spirit, in a real earnest, not in a gross carnal representation, but in an actual portion of the bliss to come, communicated through the sanctifying graces of the spirit. Thus we have actually a part of our reward in our hands, and not the bare distant prospect before our eyes; we see our freedom and election in the very quarter where our predecessor, the Jew, saw his bondage and reprobation. We are daily quelling through these means, some earthly enemy, rising from conquest to conquest; continually casting off something of the old man, over which Satan was victorious, and putting on something of the new, which is victorious over Satan; gradually growing into that image which has been restored to our nature through our great Redeemer, and approaching to that bliss of immortality, which, lost by the first Adam, has been regained for us by the second.

But this peculiar condition of the Christian, demands also peculiar considerations on his part. The life to come being placed so very palpably and promi-

nently before him, and casting into shadow all the toils and troubles of this life; being ever present to us as the grand feature of the Gospel, mingling itself with all our thoughts and actions, it becomes so familiar to our minds,—so completely a thing of course, that we are apt to lose sight of the extraordinary value of the gift, and to under-rate, if not cast out of account, the difficulties which lie in the way of attaining it: we rest in the end, and become too indifferent to the means. Let us now, therefore, proceed to inquire into the view with which we should contemplate this prize, referring, for the sake of illustration, to those considerations which enhance the value of an earthly prize, and which may be reduced, 1. To our inadequacy of desert; 2. To the distance from which the object once appeared to be removed from us; 3. To the difficulties which have been overcome in the way.

On the first ground, let us look into our own hearts, and consider our nature as it is absolutely, without any relation to what it has received from God's restoring grace. What a scene is here! Can we discern in it a single seed of everlasting peace and joy? If it is to inherit such a blessed state, surely we ought to espy some elements of such in its constitution, and if the immortal principle, of which we feel conscious within ourselves, assure us

of a world come, should there not be corresponding traces in our frame of mind to assure us, as initiatory elements, of the peace, and joy, and purity of that world to come? But now let us look at that promised state of blessedness and glory, and then withdraw our eyes, to fix them upon our own bosoms. Can the tumult and disquiet of the pride, the pangs of the evil passions, the darkness of the ignorance which confront us here, have the least in common with the dazzling brightness of the peace, and innocence, and knowledge, which met us there? Can one by any natural possibility lead to the other? So far from this, would it not lead in a totally different direction? Yea, eternal death itself had been a signal mercy, had we been left thus by our offended Father in heaven. For that immortality, of which we have the seeds within us, could then have been no other than that enjoyed by the fallen angels; a woful prolongation to all eternity of the misery and degradation ensuing upon our apostacy. Had death, therefore, been our final doom, we should even then have stood in the place of a pardoned criminal. What shall we say, then, if God hath not only pardoned this criminal, but even restored him to his former rank and state of enjoyment? For from that dreadful immortality we have been rescued by our divine Redeemer; so that

passing from this earthly state of sin through death, we may rise again to an immortality still more glorious than that in which the first man was placed. Can we arrive at any thing like a due estimate of this so great mercy; may we not despair of so doing in the words of the Apostle,—"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." (Rom. xi. 33.)

Let us add to this the price at which this seeming impossibility of the union of our sinful nature with everlasting innocence and joy, has been purchased, being no less than the sacrifice of the Son of God in human nature upon the Cross. What shall we say of the value of the prize proposed to us? Let the purest, the most heavenly-minded among us, carefully look into his bosom, discuss his own words, thoughts, and deeds, endeavour thus to discover his own real position, and then gaze up at the place to which his Redeemer's merits have advanced him. He will confess his own utter ineffable unworthiness, and adore the unspeakable love of Him who brought him the gift, and own with tears of thankfulness and joy its inestimable value. The Cross, with all its previous and accompanying sorrows, pangs, and humiliation, led the way to the glorification of our human nature in Jesus Christ. On this contrast we

should fix our look: reading in the one the extreme of misery and sin into which man had fallen, beholding the price, exceeding all powers of calculation, which was requisite to procure his redemption, to free him from the servitude of a tyrannous master loth to forego his hold of a slave so manageable, in the possession of whom he enjoyed the consciousness of his power; and seeing in the other the exceeding bliss, such as never could enter into the thoughts of man, which is laid in store for him in the world to come. From this constant contemplation let him learn the utter inadequacy of his own deserts of eternal happiness; and in full reliance on the merits of his Saviour's sufferings, in deep humility at his own total unworthiness, looking to the end in steady and joyful hope, so work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.

On the second ground, we carry into our consideration of this heavenly prize, the same short-sighted and paltry views as we take up in our pursuit of earthly objects. Of these, whatever their intrinsic value may be, we are accustomed to prefer such as require least time to be passed in the toil of attainment; so that a very inferior object, attainable through a short interval, shall be preferred to a far more excellent, coming after a long period of labour and expectation. Thus we think and act, because time, in proportion to its

length, admits of so many more intervening accidents, of so many more competitions, of so much more which may snatch the prize from our grasp. And thus the more splendid prizes of life being apparently removed from any given individual's attainment, seem in expectation the common property of all,—are admired, talked of, but never seriously striven after, except by minds of deep foresight and energy, which fully aware of the difficulties, have also determined to overcome them. Now, though much of this habit of thought be inapplicable in the case before us, since neither rivals nor fortune can disappoint our exertions, still from inveterate habit we carry it into the consideration of this heavenly reward; which, excellent beyond the utmost power of our estimation, as all readily allow it to be, yet is placed at a far greater distance still than the remotest of earthly prizes, being even beyond the boundaries of this life. We prefer, therefore, though not in speculation, yet certainly in practice, any of the mean and fleeting enjoyments of the world present; and as a small object placed before the eye will cover the largest at a distance, so do the worthless prizes of this life, one succeeding to the other, cover from view the glorious reward of the life to come. It is well for us if we can obtain a steady glimpse or two between the intervals of this succession; and better still

if we can retain the impression which has been made. But moreover, those very points which render our mode of contemplating earthly prizes inapplicable here, add to our carelessness. Where the chances of fortune are removed, all seems to be certainty; internal impediments are forgotten, where external do not obtrude on our sight,—where all may obtain, all are slack; and thus the small degree of exertion which is seen around them, comes at last to most men to appear quite adequate to the end, and they bestow indiscriminately on themselves and their friends, the certain expectation of this precious inheritance, when neither they nor themselves have moved perhaps a foot, or lifted so much as a hand, or directed even an eye towards the desire of its attainment.

On the third ground, of the difficulties to be surmounted, men are apt to run into extremes,—the reckless never bestow a thought upon them,—those who are for the first time opening their eyes to the prospect of eternity, are too apt to be scared at the awful front which they present: habitual contemplation alone can place them in their proper point of view, and administer a wholesome fear to the carelessness of the one, and supply a cheerful hope to the despondency of the other. If the attainment be indeed so easy, to what purpose were the incredible

toils and sufferings of the Apostles, and all the martyrs and confessors of the church? If it be so insurmountably difficult, who even of that glorious company can be pronounced among the saved? But however impossible to man, this is possible to God; and his grace preventing and furthering us, will gain us the victory in the end. Without this all human exertion were indeed vain: as well would man attempt to move the earth towards heaven. While we have the assurance of this help from above, who shall despond, who rather shall not be sanguine? But let him be sanguine, and derive the testimony to the possession of this grace, from the consciousness of his own exertions; let him expect grace from God's promise; let him find its possession from his own operations. But the number of the despondents is few indeed, compared with that of the confident. Let, then, these latter open the page of Scripture, and read what is told them there. Are we not there told that our fleshly appetites must be crucified, even as our Lord was crucified; that if we think to enjoy with Christ, we must also suffer with him? that we are soldiers in a warfare, wrestlers in a struggle, runners in a race? that our best human affections may be taken captive, that our faith may suffer shipwreck, that our surest foot may slide or stumble? and thus by a multitude of similar figures scattered

throughout, are we not continually called back from that state of the good easy man in which we are so fond of indulging,—awakened from that drowsiness which is so often surprising us? And yet all this while, that we are indifferent to the labours which shall find our only true reward, we will not cease forsooth from those toils which bring the rewards of this life, paltry and fleeting though they be. O no! we will put body and mind on the rack; we will sacrifice peace, yea, even of the mind; surrender all comforts of the body; rising early and taking rest late, looking ever steadfastly and patiently to the end. All this we will do, and yet shrink from the exertions which lead to eternal life. God give us grace and wisdom to estimate the nature of those exertions, as superior in excellence to such as procure an earthly prize, as their reward is. These are often hurtful, even fatal to bodily health: those nourish our spiritual health. These prepare the way of death, those of everlasting life. This struggle brings into play all the uneasy disquieting affections of our corrupt nature,—anger, envy, jealousy, discontent, strife; nay, even heresy, sedition, and murder. While that developes all the Christian graces, unfolds our best affections, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. This may indeed, at best, serve to keep the mind by means of occupation, from

sundry temptations; but that puts it beyond all possible reach of them. That, is a spirit dispelling the whole train of temptations; this, is often slack and interrupted, because of the uncertainty of the prize. To that the prize is as certain as the word of God, who is truth, is true. This, may be given up through despair, on our encountering more powerful competitors: that, is encouraged, and never can be depressed by rivalry. Here only one can attain, there all may be rewarded. This, we may have an aversion to engage in on good principles; that, we can never relinquish but upon bad. Sad humiliating testimony all this to the corruption of our nature, which will so readily undertake the former; so uniformly and willingly turn from the latter.

And what right have we, restless indefatigable wordlings, to complain of difficulties? do we not consider that the very difficulties which obstruct the road of attainment, enhance the value of an earthly prize; and does not this enhanced value reflect in return upon the difficulties, and lighten their burden? and shall we refuse this cheering solace in seeking a heavenly prize; and shall we who can be so patient in working even against God, and at all events without God, become desponding the moment that we begin to work with him, and he

But some one may here object that we have a clear view of our earthly prizes, and an understanding of them so distinct that we know exactly how to time, to temper, and to direct our exertions; we know when to lie down in security against their loss, when to rise up in the certainty of their attainment, and thus we work our way onward with the cheerful willingness arising from knowing that our exertions are proportionate. But we are to a very great extent ignorant of the nature of our heavenly prize, except that no exertions of man can of themselves be proportionate, and, therefore, we cannot experience that readiness and reasonable confidence. Now, in answer to this we may be content to ask this simple question, 'Are our notions indeed so clear concerning the nature of the objects of our worldly exertions? What, indeed! do we never find them on attainment vastly inferior to the appearance which they made when in prospect? do we always find them a resting-point upon the past, or but the commencement of fresh and still more wearying toils to come? do we find them all that we expected, or of an entirely contrary nature,—opposed as gall to honey, as war to peace, as life to death,—and telling us that we have sown the wind, and reaped the whirlwind? do we set up there our staff of rest, or on our arrival hear a voice cry out, 'On, on,' and

find at this long-expected stage of bliss, that to stay is imminent hazard, to go on is destruction, to return is an impossibility? If faithful experience informs us thus of our real ignorance of the true nature of our earthly prizes, shall we carp at our everlasting reward, which indeed is not, as they are, contrary to our previous notions, but infinitely surpassing them; while more of its nature has been revealed, there is more than enough to engage us with all confidence to seek to attain. What! do not these objectors take measures for length of life? here is life eternal. Do they not strive for fading earthly crowns? here is an everlasting heavenly crown. Do they not covet peace, rest, joy, gladness? here is peace, rest, joy, gladness, unutterable, inextinguishable. All that is lovely, all that is of good report, all that is truly desirable in the prizes of this world is to be found here, and in a higher state of perfection in the proportion of heaven to earth; nay more, even our sense of enjoyment, exquisite as it may seem, and full of blessing to us, even when most spiritualized,—is but an element, poor and beggarly, of that taste of unutterable bliss, which shall be the joy of the world to come. Independently, therefore, even of God's constant help and encouragement, we work onwards in this case with a more reasonable hope than in the case of

the most assured, best understood, and most highly valued of earthly prizes. Again, what right have we to complain of difficulties, if he who hath proposed the prize hath duly forewarned us of them,—hath directed us how to overcome them, and pledged to us his assistance in overcoming them: when he has set both before us, shall we think to take up the one without the other, the wages without the labour? No,—to this latter we must direct our chief attention, as the means to the former; we must weigh well the cost, and instead of resting in easy security on the end, or looking with vain and ambitious curiosity into the nature and degree of the fruition of the glory which God hath not revealed, diligently address ourselves to the duties which he has revealed, which he demands of us as heirs of that glory. Our reward is indeed in heaven, but we and our work are upon earth; there is the bliss, and the life eternal; here is the Cross, and the grave: not that earth and his toils on earth are to have the entire eye of the Christian, and that it shall never be lifted up to take in the ample bright sky of bliss and glory above. For to that glory, even the invisible glory which the Son enjoys with the Father, every face in heaven and in earth, of angels and of men, must be turned in rapt contemplation, crying out in spirit to one another, 'Holy,

holy, holy, Lord God of Host, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.' The contemplation of this is in fact the food of intelligence to every rational being, in all gradations down to man; and exclusion from this is to man that second death, which shuts out from the invisible realms of our Lord and Master, even as the first does from the visible. This according to the degree of intensity with which it is viewed, assigns to every intelligent being his rank in the creation, and its degree of perception distinguishes the spiritual from the natural man. But far different from such a contemplation, is the vain and curious anticipation of that glory which shall be imparted to the faithful, in the kingdom of the next world; for this, drawing away the attention from the work set before us, no less than from the real glory before mentioned, is as unsure and unfounded as it is impure and selfish. It is the fabric of worldly lust and ambition, the heaven which we build for ourselves on pride; it is a view so gross and so unworthy, that we cannot but embody in it our human passions and conceptions,—a state into which we admit ourselves by thrusting others out, and therefore like the disciples, whose words have been quoted for the text, we shall be grievously disappointed in the hour of trial. Whenever, therefore, we do contemplate the glory which shall reward the faithful

servants of Christ, we must look at it with that comprehensive glance, which shall at the same time include all the difficulties which lie in the way; with a heart set at least as much upon suffering and overcoming the one, as upon attaining and possessing the other. The future bliss will thus be to us in spirit, what the sun is in the body to the man who is intent upon his work before him. For that sun, while it shines over his head, cheers him in his toils, lights him to his labour, enabling him to direct his hand unerringly to its object, and satisfies him with the consciousness of its presence, imprest by its effects; yet will not bear long and direct contemplation, without dazzling his sight, and rendering the idle gazer inefficient for his work. And assuredly the work set before the labourer in Christ's vineyard demands all his clearness of vision, all his steadiness of contemplation; that, unseduced and undismayed by appearances, he may penetrate through them into realities, turning away from unsubstantial good to look with an unaverted eye upon danger and trouble,—upon agony, the cross, and the grave; and thence at length to gaze up in unshrinking hope at the glory which shall be revealed in the end.

Having drawn a lesson from the errors of these two disciples, let us derive another from their cor-

rection of those errors. If, at the moment of their uttering those despondent words, they were the predecessors of all those unstable Christians who, offended with the uncalculated and continual struggle to be undergone by spirit against flesh; thrown into despair by the hourly jeopardy in which they are held by surrounding trials and temptations; and tost about by the fluctuation of their own unsettled notions, and by winds of diverse doctrines, and longing for rest and finding none, cry out in their vexation and disappointment, "we thought it had been he who should redeem Israel";—so also were they, in their after-life, the predecessors of all those Christians, who have persevered unshaken to the end, and have bequeathed to us a glorious example of what the Spirit of God can effect in the heart of man. They were among the captains of that noble host of martyrs and confessors, who fought a long and unwearied fight in the cause of their Master against the world and its prince; who struggled daily, and daily triumphed, against pains of body, pangs of mind; who, familiar with sorrow as their most intimate companion in this life, ate their bread amid groans, and mingled their drink with tears; to whom all things came adverse; whom nothing disheartened; to whom loss of fortune, loss of friends, cold, hunger, naked-

ness, and the sword, came as signals from their blessed leader—as in the crisis of a desperate battle—to take up a new, and still more perilous post, and engage with redoubled ardour; who quitted the world as conquerors, leaving behind them an enemy, with whom they had made no compromise, to whom they had surrendered no fortress.

# SERMON XIII.

## THE PROFESSION OF A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

HEBR. iv. 14.

*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.*

THE word Profession is used in Scripture in two senses; either properly, for the free acknowledgment of our belief in the promises of God; or improperly, for those promises themselves. Either sense will suit the passage before us, and bring it to the same result in meaning. We will, however, consider it in the former sense, inasmuch as it necessarily implies the latter, and affords more scope for a full examination of the text.

At the moment when man is admitted into covenant with God, or performs any act, as prayer or sacrifice, under that covenant, it is necessary that he bring with him two things; namely, repentance, by

which he shall renounce the past, and faith, by which he shall accept the future; meeting with the one, the forgiveness of God,—with the other, his gifts of grace and the life to come. These, which are the subjects of his private acknowledgment before God, are also the grounds of his profession before men. These supply the declarations of his lips, these are the base and support of his practice. By the uninterrupted exhibition of these in word and deed through life, he holds fast his profession.

The nature of that repentance, and of that faith, as held in the different stages of the Church, we have already seen. According as they are more deep and full, the profession will be more strict and firm. There is, moreover, a circumstance accompanying this profession, which requires our notice, and which will be found to vary in the different periods.

In his communications with man, God deposits ever with him some pledge by which to assure him And thus we find the inspired men of old, as Isaiah and Zachariah, demanding of God a sign, in order to be certified of the reality of the communication. Again,—societies formed amongst men necessarily require some badge by which their members shall be distinguished from the rest of mankind. When God, therefore, establishes his covenant with a portion of mankind, these two reasons will concur

to distinguish them by a mark, which, on the part of God, will be some symbol or representation of the benefit conferred; on the part of man, a badge, reminding him of his peculiarity amid the great body of mankind. Such marks are circumcision and baptism.

Where then, it may be asked, is the mark impressed on the member of the Patriarchal church? In the first place, since this church contained all mankind, none could be necessary on the part of man. Again, on the part of God, on whose covenant with Adam that church was founded, the very existence of man, which had been forfeited, and then restored in Adam,—the very sight of fellow men,—the very breath which each each moment drew, was a symbol most significant indeed; a symbol, too, which, however added to, has never been superseded. As we all, at this very day, bear in our bodies the traces of the offence of Adam, so do we also of his pardon.

It may also be asked, why, since in Christ the church is once more opened to all mankind, is the badge of baptism required? That it was necessary on the part of God, as entering into covenant with man, we have seen. That it is necessary on the part of man is evident, because though all are actually born of the flesh of the first Adam, all are but

potentially born in the spirit of the second Adam, and this distinction will obtain to the end. The Patriarchal church was founded in the hope of the Redeemer to come,—a hope which would be the inheritance of all mankind down from their head and representative: the Christian church was founded on the accomplishment of the Redeemer come, and men have no general representative under whom they can be certified of this fact; they must come to the knowledge of it gradually and partially. This farther appears from the connexion of baptism with circumcision. This latter rite exhibited a twofold view,—one a temporal, which it confined to the Jew, conveying to him his right of inheritance to the land of Canaan, and other privileges derived from his father Abraham, and to which the mark in the flesh appertained as the seal: the other a spiritual, admitting to the kingdom of heaven all mankind, in virtue of the original covenant with Adam, through means of his promised seed, which was now restricted to the line of Abraham. To this belonged the circumcision of the heart, without which qualification it was indiscernible; and to this baptism is the successor, administering in substance what this conveyed in hope. But as that spiritual circumcision, though not represented, was conveyed by the circumcision of the flesh, and as this latter is abolished

by the abolition of the law, a new seal must be established; and this seal is a lively symbol of the blessing conveyed. It is immersion in water which represents to us our death to sin and new birth to righteousness, analogous to the death and resurrection of Christ; and also in the washing of our bodies expresses the washing of our souls by the merits of his blood, and their purification by the sanctifying graces of the Holy Spirit. Aptly with its spiritual sense it leaves no mark upon the flesh, but having performed the part of the seal and sign of God's covenant, quits all farther hold of the body, and surrenders the person to all his heavenly privileges.

Our profession, as compared with that of the Patriarch and Jew, will be this. We profess with them to repent, and renounce the world and its lusts; to die to sin and live again unto righteousness. But we do this with such a death and life being made especially imperative upon us, being also actually proposed and represented to us in the death and resurrection of the author of our forgiveness. We also profess our entire faith in the truth of his promises. But the greater part of what were promises to them are gifts to us; and such gifts as still remain in expectance, and not in possession, are rendered distinct, appreciable, and certain from the accomplishment of the others; they have even been

exemplified to us: the life after death in the resurrection of the Lord, the bounteous gifts of his spirit in the graces and powers of his saints, from the day of Pentecost until now. Thus our profession is distinctly marked out to us: there is no room for doubt, no excuse for vacillation; it is not shadowy, so as to elude our grasp, it is not indefinite in any point, so as at times to escape from it; it is so substantial, so comprehensible, that if we hold it not fast, the fault lies with our own weakness and wavering. What had Adam, what had Abraham, what had the Prophets for the grounds of their profession, compared with this? Verily the least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than them all.

The most practical part of our profession lies in the renunciation of the world, whose ways, having been far more openly detected, and awfully condemned by the Gospel than by any previous dispensation, we are more peculiarly called upon to reprobate and abandon. What fellow-feeling can a true child of God in Christ have with it? It is bent on the joys and pleasures of this life, therefore the Cross of Christ, with its crucifying afflictions, is a stumbling-block to it. It is wise in its own conceit, and therefore that Cross is foolishness to it; it worships rank and power, and therefore that Cross is contemptible to it. It loves its own will and ways,

and therefore that Cross is hateful to it. As the convert in baptism takes a new name to shew that he is a new creature, so must he take up new names for the things of the world, in which he moves as a new creature; its joy will be his sorrow, its good his evil,—in all things a new vocabulary will be adopted.

The Jew bore on his body the mark of his calling in Abraham; however, and wherever, he lived, his flesh bore testimony to his being a member of that covenant which gave his nation the inheritance of the land of Canaan. But our mark must be on the spirit, as heirs of a spiritual kingdom, never to be obliterated there. That mark must be a peculiarity of thought, originating a peculiarity of action, by which we may be distinguished from those without; word, and thought, and deed, must all have upon them the stamp of the cross of Christ. Even where we are obliged, from our common nature, to feel and do as other men, yet here we shall discover the mark of our calling. This feeling and doing will go but a short way with the world: if developed into any continued train of reflection, or expanded into any deliberate act, the eye will immediately discover its peculiar form, and acknowledge in it our profession. How should it be otherwise? We see how deeply the characters and conversation of men are imbued with the spirit of their worldly professions. The

soldier, the scholar, the merchant, carry each the peculiar stamp of their occupation into their most free and disengaged moments. Their thoughts cannot without some effort be broken up from those clusters into which the due performance of their several duties has a tendency to combine them. And the more strictly they perform those duties, and the more signal their success, the deeper also is the tinge of this mark. Should it, therefore, be otherwise with the Christian, the exercise of whose profession is not, like theirs, limited to certain places and certain seasons; who is not now in full occupation, and then in utter leisure, but is ever engaged, and has before his eyes for his reward, not the honours or wealth of this fleeting world, but the bliss of the world everlasting? Shall not his mouth speak from the fulness of his heart? And if the soldier's heart be in the camp, the merchant's in his freighted vessels, so that the language of the one would sound absurd from the mouth of the other; shall there be no such distinction between the man of this world, and the man of the next? Their heart cannot have the same object, and can therefore the language of the one proceed from the mouth of the other, without an immediate and glaring contradiction to his profession? Shall a clean vessel pour forth what is unclean? Shall a heart overflowing with

love, joy, and thankfulness, for the mercies of God shown in our redemption,—shall a mind exalted in the Spirit, far beyond the pitch to which the natural man could attain, supported daily by the daily soaring contemplation of the unravelled mysteries of God,—shall these send forth no language of their own, shall they speak but as worldlings speak? It cannot be. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament telleth his handiwork;" and shall the great work of God's hands, a living spirit, twice-created, regenerated man, shall not his voice be heard among them? Shall not the glory of God be manifested from him, the chief of God's works, and cast in his own image? This is the Christian's profession: thus he must be a shining light amid darkness, telling from his firmament by an inextinguishable brightness of character, and by duly regulated motions of conduct, the glory, and the power, and the dominion, and the majesty of the almighty author of his salvation.

It is true that in no case should we think too highly of ourselves. But in the case of our station and corresponding profession as Christians, we can never think highly enough; and our constant endeavour must be to proceed from a higher to a higher pitch, so that the note and song of our profession may, like the trumpet of God, wax louder and louder.

Look at the proud ones of this world, at them who do indeed think of themselves more highly than they ought. What a constant, jealous vigilance is there to maintain their dignity; what a cautious mingling with the general world; what a barrier do they try to throw around their communications, in order to keep off all intrusion of vulgar taint. Shall not then the Christian, whose honour is real and not conventional; inward and essential, not outward and accidental; derived from a heavenly incorruptible fountain, not from an earthly and corruptible; from eternity, not from yesterday; immortal, and not perishing;—shall not he guard this with equal vigilance and scrupulosity, and keep it pure and unspotted from the world? Still more, if earthly rank, which lives on the breath of the world, and which is averse but to its conventional and not real impurities, can draw a line of separation, shall not the follower of the Cross of Christ, which is at enmity with the world, and loathes all its impurities, shall he not trace around him a clear decided mark of distinction?

Having thus viewed the nature of our profession, in reference to our daily practice, let us proceed to apply the argument of the Apostle in the passage whence the text has been taken.

The persons to whom he writes were suffering under severe persecution, under the most trying of

all, namely, that which comes from their own countrymen, and the professors of the religion which they had abandoned; and so trying had it already been, that several apostacies seem to have taken place, and more to be about taking place. He shows them, therefore, the ground on which, in this case, they should stand, and hold fast their profession. It is the ground of Jesus Christ having suffered before them, and after his sufferings ascended into rest and glory. And that not only thus had they an example in their Master, and a pledge of a similar reward to similar sufferings, but moreover that he is sitting now at the throne of God as High Priest in intercession for us, in which we can securely repose all confidence, inasmuch as we know, from his sufferings here, that he can sympathise with us. The Apostle has here only applied a particular example to meet a particular occasion. But his argument is applicable to every circumstance of life; for there is not one in which the firmness of grasp with which we hold fast our profession, is not more or less put to the proof. Now since life is made up of joy and sorrow, the latter of which has been met by the Apostle, let us, with an argument from the same source, meet the former. We have, indeed, only to reverse the order of the argument, and as he argued from Christ's affliction to his joy, so must we from

his joy to his affliction. When through the abundant mercy of God, our hearts are overflowing with joy, amid the bounties of this life, shall we go no further; shall we stay at the limits of the body, and not proceed in spirit, and as we gladly refer our afflictions to his, so also our joys? Shall we not soar on the wings of this at best imperfect joy, to that glorious presence where it reigns in its fulness, and join the heavenly choir in the song of triumph to the Redeemer; and then, seeing through what afflictions his joy was perfected, prepare our hearts to meet such interruption, so that when it shall come, we may trample it under foot as conquerors,—having learned to fix our looks, steadfast and unaverted, on the everlasting joys of heaven,—having, through a right use of our allotted season of joy, attained the inseparable fellowship of that joy, which no man can take away from us, from which none of the weapons of this world, be they famine, persecution, or the sword, shall ever have power to divide us? Thus, through all the changes of this mortal life, we shall hold fast our profession, shall stand rooted in the faith of Christ Jesus, who suffered, and now reigneth in glory.

The Apostle's expression, "*let us* hold fast our profession;" and a little above, "let us *labour* to enter into that rest,"—implies that this firmness of

hold on our profession, has a continual resistance opposed to it. Hence it will be different at different times in the same man, growing as he does from strength to strength; and it will be different in different persons, according to the progress they have made in that faith which overcometh the world. The whole body of Christians, therefore, will present a motley appearance, and may from the unbeliever,—to whose eye the weak, as most numerous, and more in contact with himself, will be much more obvious than the strong,—draw forth the charge of hypocrisy or superstition. But to the mind of the lowly and charitable Christian, a very different result will arise, and a lesson will be taught him full of warning and instruction. In the Church of God there must be a series of believers of different attainments, stretching from him who has but a moment ago quitted the gross elements of the world, to him who has far advanced into the regions of the spirit,—from the newly born infant, to the full grown man. There will, however, be a clear mark of distinction between the lowest of these beings and the world. They will all have this common character, namely, that they are striving to attain that; however weak their flesh may be, yet their spirit is willing. All are engaged in a race: some therefore are foremost, some hindmost; but these last are very distinct from the mere

lookers on, which are the sons of this world. And the most backward Christian will be distinguished above the mere man of morals, inasmuch as the latter will be stationary, while the former is pressing on. The latter may indeed, at a given moment, be standing nearer the goal of moral perfection, while the former may be at some distance; but then the one never leaves his place, the other is continually advancing, and in due time passes beyond. Even at his farthest distance from the goal, he will show that he is a racer, and not a spectator, by the proofs which he gives of his will to proceed; which are, his readiness to acknowledge and repair his offences, his self-rebuke for his failings, his lowliness to ask his neighbour's forgiveness, and charity to impart his own; and a careful record kept in his memory of the places in which he has hitherto stumbled, with a resolution to avoid the like mishap again. Spirit-stirring indeed is such a view of the companions of his profession, to the Christian. He will in charity place every neighbour more forward than he really is in the race; in humility he will place himself more backward, and setting himself down in his own opinion among the last, will the most earnestly pursue his resolution to be among the first.

We may consider the resistance opposed by the world to our profession, and our gradual triumph

love, joy, and thankfulness, for the mercies of God shown in our redemption,—shall a mind exalted in the Spirit, far beyond the pitch to which the natural man could attain, supported daily by the daily soaring contemplation of the unravelled mysteries of God,—shall these send forth no language of their own, shall they speak but as worldlings speak? It cannot be. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament telleth his handiwork;" and shall the great work of God's hands, a living spirit, twice-created, regenerated man, shall not his voice be heard among them? Shall not the glory of God be manifested from him, the chief of God's works, and cast in his own image? This is the Christian's profession: thus he must be a shining light amid darkness, telling from his firmament by an inextinguishable brightness of character, and by duly regulated motions of conduct, the glory, and the power, and the dominion, and the majesty of the almighty author of his salvation.

It is true that in no case should we think too highly of ourselves. But in the case of our station and corresponding profession as Christians, we can never think highly enough; and our constant endeavour must be to proceed from a higher to a higher pitch, so that the note and song of our profession may, like the trumpet of God, wax louder and louder.

Look at the proud ones of this world, at them who do indeed think of themselves more highly than they ought. What a constant, jealous vigilance is there to maintain their dignity; what a cautious mingling with the general world; what a barrier do they try to throw around their communications, in order to keep off all intrusion of vulgar taint. Shall not then the Christian, whose honour is real and not conventional; inward and essential, not outward and accidental; derived from a heavenly incorruptible fountain, not from an earthly and corruptible; from eternity, not from yesterday; immortal, and not perishing;—shall not he guard this with equal vigilance and scrupulosity, and keep it pure and unspotted from the world? Still more, if earthly rank, which lives on the breath of the world, and which is averse but to its conventional and not real impurities, can draw a line of separation, shall not the follower of the Cross of Christ, which is at enmity with the world, and loathes all its impurities, shall he not trace around him a clear decided mark of distinction?

Having thus viewed the nature of our profession, in reference to our daily practice, let us proceed to apply the argument of the Apostle in the passage whence the text has been taken.

The persons to whom he writes were suffering under severe persecution, under the most trying of

all, namely, that which comes from their own countrymen, and the professors of the religion which they had abandoned; and so trying had it already been, that several apostacies seem to have taken place, and more to be about taking place. He shows them, therefore, the ground on which, in this case, they should stand, and hold fast their profession. It is the ground of Jesus Christ having suffered before them, and after his sufferings ascended into rest and glory. And that not only thus had they an example in their Master, and a pledge of a similar reward to similar sufferings, but moreover that he is sitting now at the throne of God as High Priest in intercession for us, in which we can securely repose all confidence, inasmuch as we know, from his sufferings here, that he can sympathise with us. The Apostle has here only applied a particular example to meet a particular occasion. But his argument is applicable to every circumstance of life; for there is not one in which the firmness of grasp with which we hold fast our profession, is not more or less put to the proof. Now since life is made up of joy and sorrow, the latter of which has been met by the Apostle, let us, with an argument from the same source, meet the former. We have, indeed, only to reverse the order of the argument, and as he argued from Christ's affliction to his joy, so must we from

his joy to his affliction. When through the abundant mercy of God, our hearts are overflowing with joy, amid the bounties of this life, shall we go no further; shall we stay at the limits of the body, and not proceed in spirit, and as we gladly refer our afflictions to his, so also our joys? Shall we not soar on the wings of this at best imperfect joy, to that glorious presence where it reigns in its fulness, and join the heavenly choir in the song of triumph to the Redeemer; and then, seeing through what afflictions his joy was perfected, prepare our hearts to meet such interruption, so that when it shall come, we may trample it under foot as conquerors,—having learned to fix our looks, steadfast and unaverted, on the everlasting joys of heaven,—having, through a right use of our allotted season of joy, attained the inseparable fellowship of that joy, which no man can take away from us, from which none of the weapons of this world, be they famine, persecution, or the sword, shall ever have power to divide us? Thus, through all the changes of this mortal life, we shall hold fast our profession, shall stand rooted in the faith of Christ Jesus, who suffered, and now reigneth in glory.

The Apostle's expression, "*let us* hold fast our profession;" and a little above, "let us *labour* to enter into that rest,"—implies that this firmness of

hold on our profession, has a continual resistance opposed to it. Hence it will be different at different times in the same man, growing as he does from strength to strength; and it will be different in different persons, according to the progress they have made in that faith which overcometh the world. The whole body of Christians, therefore, will present a motley appearance, and may from the unbeliever,—to whose eye the weak, as most numerous, and more in contact with himself, will be much more obvious than the strong,—draw forth the charge of hypocrisy or superstition. But to the mind of the lowly and charitable Christian, a very different result will arise, and a lesson will be taught him full of warning and instruction. In the Church of God there must be a series of believers of different attainments, stretching from him who has but a moment ago quitted the gross elements of the world, to him who has far advanced into the regions of the spirit,—from the newly born infant, to the full grown man. There will, however, be a clear mark of distinction between the lowest of these beings and the world. They will all have this common character, namely, that they are striving to attain that; however weak their flesh may be, yet their spirit is willing. All are engaged in a race: some therefore are foremost, some hindmost; but these last are very distinct from the mere

lookers on, which are the sons of this world. And the most backward Christian will be distinguished above the mere man of morals, inasmuch as the latter will be stationary, while the former is pressing on. The latter may indeed, at a given moment, be standing nearer the goal of moral perfection, while the former may be at some distance; but then the one never leaves his place, the other is continually advancing, and in due time passes beyond. Even at his farthest distance from the goal, he will show that he is a racer, and not a spectator, by the proofs which he gives of his will to proceed; which are, his readiness to acknowledge and repair his offences, his self-rebuke for his failings, his lowliness to ask his neighbour's forgiveness, and charity to impart his own; and a careful record kept in his memory of the places in which he has hitherto stumbled, with a resolution to avoid the like mishap again. Spirit-stirring indeed is such a view of the companions of his profession, to the Christian. He will in charity place every neighbour more forward than he really is in the race; in humility he will place himself more backward, and setting himself down in his own opinion among the last, will the most earnestly pursue his resolution to be among the first.

We may consider the resistance opposed by the world to our profession, and our gradual triumph

over it, in another light. We are thus engaged in a spiritual fight with it, and must have many wounds before we be conquerors. Were it not so, the enemy would yield at the first blow; ever as we advanced, all would flee in rout and dismay, all the strongholds of sin would surrender at the very first summons, which we blew with the trump of the Gospel. Our course upon earth would be a glorious uninterrupted triumph, and the gates of heaven would unfold, and receive us unwounded, unfatigued. But be who he will, the Christian has to fight an obstinate, a continual fight; and like those kings, who, fighting for earthly kingdoms, have by severe defeats well nigh lost their own, and won at last after a long series of doubtful success; so also fares this spiritual king,—so fights he for a heavenly kingdom, nor can he cry out victory, but with his dying breath. Then, indeed, and not till then, he may, in a sense as opposite as his thoughts are to those of the apostate king, exclaim, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!" And thanks be to him who giveth us the victory, even Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Though the water of baptism hath left no outward mark upon us, to put us in continual remembrance of our profession, yet several of its accompaniments remain, and should produce this effect upon us. Our very name is one of them, and as that of

Eve, which she received after the promise of the seed; of Abraham after the promise of the Christ; of Paul after his conversion to Christ; forcibly reminded them of their change of circumstances: so should ours carry us back to the moment, when, being admitted into covenant with Christ, our condition was changed, and there was created for us a new earth, and a new heaven: behold! all things were new. But still more should the titles, of which we thenceforward became possessors, declare unto us in most awful terms our profession. "Christian," should proclaim to us that we are followers of Christ, and have placed our will under obedience to his will. "Children of God," should suggest that we were once mere non-entities, but have been born into a world of real spiritual existence, and must be daily growing towards the mature and perfect man. "Inheritor of the kingdom of heaven," should continually preach unto us the high prize for which we are contending; assure the certainty of our reward, if we continue faithful to the end. "Saints in light," should remind us of the holiness of the profession to which we have been called, of the gift of the sanctifying graces of the Holy Spirit; of the light of the gospel into which we have been brought, from the darkness of the ignorance of the natural man. If the titles indicative of rank, merit, or wealth, accorded by the

society of the world, perpetually stimulate their possessors to maintain the substance which they represent,—without which they are a shadow, or even convey a reproach upon their bearer, how much more shall the sound of his titles operate upon the member of the fellowship of the saints, of the society of the Church of God.

Great, indeed, is our happiness, glorious our condition. We have not received the seal of circumcision, to assure us of a Redeemer to come in the latter days,—we have not received the giftless baptism of John, to prepare us for Christ on the point of coming; but we have received the baptism in Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who has come, and has shed upon us an abundance of spiritual gifts. All which God gave to mankind separately and at long intervals from the beginning of the world, hath been poured in one concentrated shower upon us, yea, and not only that, but what they of old received were not only but a part of what we have, but the rude and beggarly elements of the corresponding part which has come to us. Yea, and not only that, but all which they received, even in the perfect and ripe state in which they have been bestowed upon us, form but a part of our bounteous whole. Sacrifice, in all its relations and bearings, has been perfected; all its mystic meanings laid open; prophecy has been

accomplished, and our food is certainty instead of hope. The Holy Spirit hath poured forth in profusion all his gifts. Not a doubt remains to perplex us, not a desire is left to be fulfilled. The groans of the creature have ceased. The very terms of our baptism, which was in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, declare the entire plenitude of the heavenly possessions which have been committed to us, and the effulgence and completeness of the revelation which we are enjoying. Bearing these things in mind, let us engage with all fortitude in this warfare below, and manfully fighting under Christ's banner, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, continue his faithful soldiers and servants to our life's end; so that having realised our baptism into the death of Christ, we may become joyful partakers of the bliss of his resurrection.

# SERMON XIV.

## ON THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY IN THE CHURCH OF GOD.

1 Cor. ii. 2.

*For I desired to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

These forcible expressions are supposed to have been directed by St. Paul against the teachers of two systems,—most fruitful sources each of early heresy,—the questions of Greek philosophy, and of Jewish tradition; which were then vexing a church, conspicuous among the primitive seats of the Gospel for its lamentable divisions. Not unacquainted with either system, as we know St. Paul to have been, yet he deprecates most earnestly their being brought to bear in any degree upon the Gospel, to mix their turbid streams in the smallest portion with its purity; and reminds the Corinthians how he himself had preached it among them, with all simplicity and strict adherence to its principles, with an utter aban-

donment of all foreign knowledge, as if the existence of those systems had been wholly unknown to him.

It had been well if this wholesome example had been more generally followed. But down even to our own day, man has been ever thinking that he can mend God's work, interpolating his own conceits among the fundamental principles of the Gospel; and reason, deeming its province intruded upon by Revelation, has been struggling to remove the boundaries which have been set to her previously too loosely defined dominion. This has been peculiarly the case in those questions which concern the duties of life. It was indeed to be expected. Their throng, their hourly occurrence, their ingrossing interest, their wordly complexion,—are all calculated to induce men to refer them to principles much more accommodated to their own carnal notions, to sources much nearer at hand than the spirituality of the Gospel will allow. And thus not only in practice, but in theory too, a mixture has been made of the light of nature and of the illumination of the Gospel, which, while it obscures both, is more particularly injurious to the latter, in proportion to its superior strength and brightness.

It readily follows, from what has been stated in the review of the fundamental articles of the church of God, that the moral conduct of a true member of

this church, could never at any period be guided by principles which drew so much from the light of nature, as the reasoners above alluded to are ready to suppose. But as the Christian dispensation is that which they have in view in all their references to religious motives, we will confine the question to this point, and consider the rule of life laid down to the member of the church of Christ. In other words, we will proceed to ascertain how the doctrine of Christ crucified, bears upon those duties which moral philosophers would fain have us derive from principles which themselves have laid down.

It will be necessary to devote a few previous observations upon their different systems, so general, however, that they will be considered as forming only two classes; in one of which the light of nature alone is consulted, in the other the aid of that of Revelation is called in.

The first contains the several systems of ancient philosophy. Their deficiency in not supplying a motive of obligation sufficiently obvious, strong, and permanent, has been the subject of frequent remark. Nevertheless, they are of inestimable value to the Christian scholar, not only from disclosing to him the peculiar points upon which a revelation was required to bear,—not only from the interest which they excite by the heart-moving comparison of their

original light of nature with our acquired illumination from the Gospel; but principally because they have almost exhausted the storehouse of human thought upon their subjects. Hither, therefore, the infidel will appeal, and here the Christian must be prepared to meet him, and make him feel the untenableness of his ground.

The second class is obviously destitute of all these advantages. It remains to see whether their loss has been counterbalanced by the acquisition of any others.

Perceiving the defect above mentioned, of the ancient systems, the authors of these have thought to supply it by calling in from revelation the doctrine of a state of future retribution. To this plan, however, there are insurmountable objections, not only from Reason, but also from the Revelation itself, whence they have borrowed.

There is an objection in Reason, first, because in a system of philosophy all ought to be traceable to one source; and this character forms the great beauty of all the ancient systems. On such a principle, therefore, a future state to which the system attaches the final motive of obligation, ought to be demonstrable, equally with the rule of life, from the light of nature; but every one knows that it is not. Thus the system is deranged, and its logical unity

dissolved by the introduction of an entirely foreign and independent principle.

A second objection on the ground of Reason is, that our assent to the doctrine of a future retribution implies an adequate notion of the divine justice. But this (as in the case of other of God's attributes) must be derived from our notions of human justice. Thus we are conducted by such a system in a vicious circle. We must have formed an adequate notion of human justice, before we can assent to the position of a future retribution; and we must assent to the position of a future retribution, before we can possess ourselves with an adequate notion of human justice. But the objections from the very Revelation itself, to which they profess themselves indebted, are of a still more serious cast.

In borrowing this doctrine from Revelation, they have entirely neglected to take with them the foundation upon which it rests,—the Cross of Christ. It has accordingly shared the fate of all facts which are introduced, detached from the natural relation of surrounding circumstances. It droops and dies, as a tree which has been transplanted without its roots; and as far as the planters are concerned, the roots have been left to perish too: for what is now their position as they lay down their transplanted doctrine

of a state of future happiness?—however stated, it amounts to this,—that a man may be saved by the law which they have there established. It is difficult to see how this materially differs from an opinion so severely reprobated by our church, (and in that reprobation every Christian church and person will join,) namely, that "every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law, and the light of nature." This is indeed removing the offence of the Cross, by removing the Cross itself; for (as our article proceeds to say, ART. 18,) Holy Scripture doth set unto us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby man must be saved.

Let it, however, be allowed (for argument's sake) that this consequence from their system has been too closely pressed. Let it even be granted that advantage has been taken of unintentional omission, of neglect of fortifying points, of latitude of language. Still the effect cannot be disputed, which is to instil into minds not culpably unwary, the above pernicious opinion, and to lead them to think the grand and essential facts of Christianity,—our Lord's incarnation, death, and burial,—an useless shew, a cumbrous machinery, the employment of which seems derogatory to the wisdom of Almighty God. Is it considerate, is it charitable, is it dutiful to our crucified

Master, to employ, or allow to be employed, a carelessness of expression pregnant with such dreadful consequences?

Putting, however, the best colour upon all this, still we find another objection behind, which cannot be set aside by any plea of mere looseness of language.

For let us supply what they may assert to be an unintentional omission; then, since of course a system of morality is applicable to all mankind, their position stands thus: that all men, by observing the duties which the system has laid down, will enjoy the future happiness which has been procured by the Cross of Christ. But where is such a position to be found in Scripture? Where has it promised a state of happiness to all mankind, upon living up to their duties? Its promises are confined exclusively within the pale of the Christian covenant, and the salvability of any without can be but the suggestion of a charitable hope; or (granting the very utmost) a fit subject of argument for such as are prepared to engage in an interminable controversy.

Thus, even upon putting the most favourable construction upon the systems of this class, we are obliged to conclude that their foundation rests upon a position, of which they affirm the certainty from Revelation, but which in fact is not to be found in any part of its records.

It may, however, still be asserted that such systems, though not applicable to all mankind, may serve to point out a rule of moral conduct to the Christian, supplying directions where the Scriptures are not practically explicit, presuppose natural principles; or perhaps are silent altogether. The state of the question, thus narrowed, brings us back to the point which was proposed to be examined, and will render much assistance to the course of argument by setting off in more prominent relief the peculiarities with which the doctrine of Christ crucified, invests all those duties which are the subjects of moral philosophy.

Let it be borne in mind, that, according to the latter systems just discussed, the motive which obliges the Christian, is the simple one of a certain expectation of future reward or punishment. According to the Gospel, it will appear to be one much more complex, or at least (even granting this to be the final), that it can never be acted upon by him except in association with a number of others of a certain class. Their rule of life also is sought among the principles of nature. In the Gospel it presupposes these, but is not confined to them; so that the Christian, calculating from those principles only, would as certainly fall into error, as he who omits important elements in any deduction of science.

They suppose only two persons—man and God. The Gospel interposes a third, the Son of God; and this of course immediately gives a new complexion to the whole question.

God the Father has made the promise of everlasting happiness to man, upon obedience to his will, operating through faith in the merits of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ; who, by taking our nature upon him, suffered death upon the Cross, in order to procure for man that inestimable blessing. But the Father, notwithstanding this reconciliation, has no immediate communication with man: he will turn away his ear from every note of praise or prayer, he will avert his face from every posture of supplication, which is not addressed to him through the mediation of the Son; through him he bids him look for every blessing now and to come, to this special relation which he has established with mankind to confess himself indebted for all: on this to hang all his hopes; and having his heart impressed with the Cross of Christ, his thoughts fixed in earnest contemplation of what his Saviour has said, done, and undergone, and thus imbued, as it were, with the baptism of his precious blood, to proceed to action.

It is evident, therefore, that the will of God is not to be sought by the Christian, merely among the natural relations of man to man. Those relations

indeed still subsist; but they are all drawn by Christ towards himself, and acted upon by his influence. Besides their mutual motions, they have also another and general course assigned them. If they follow not this course, they are not within the system of Christianity. Every act of the Christian must have some reference to an act of Christ's, displayed by him in his sojourn upon earth, and destined to exert its influence upon him, as mystically affecting his spiritual station,—as directly operating by example,—as urgently prompting by command. Thus, is God's will that we should be gratefully disposed, to be sought in the mere shallow elements to which the moral philosopher would direct us? Or shall we not rather carry into our practice that deep and settled feeling to which human language cannot give a name, that which we imbibe through every pore of mind, from the contemplation of the character and office of the Son of God.

It is evident, also, from the above considerations, that, as to motive, the Christian cannot, dare not, look at everlasting happiness, without combining in the same view the Cross of Christ. As consistently may he expunge from his creed every article intervening between God the Father Almighty, and the life everlasting. No! that life he looks forward to, through a long and permanent chain of objects,

every link of which has been designed to move both his heart and understanding; through his holy incarnation, through his holy nativity and circumcision, through his baptism, fasting, and temptation, through his agony and bloody sweat, through his cross and passion, through his precious death and burial, through his glorious resurrection and ascension, and through the coming of the Holy Ghost. This is his perspective, down this long alley of glorious and heart-stirring facts, he contemplates the life to come; and through this only, as a Christian that hopes for salvation, dares he look forward to everlasting happiness.

On a basis so widely different from that proposed by the moral philosopher, rest the duties of the Christian, even where the former has borrowed the grand doctrine of eternal life!

It may seem necessary to illustrate this bearing of the doctrine of Christ crucified, upon our practice, by a comparison of passages from the Philosopher and from Scripture, enforcing the same precept. We are, however, enabled to enter upon a parallel still more convincing and striking.

It is obvious that in the New Testament the rule of life, although throughout essentially the same, yet must differ exceedingly in clearness of object, distinctness of motive, and extent of application:

so that it will contain two modes of practice. One of these will be that which guided the true Israelite, and therefore also our Lord's followers, before the Gospel dispensation was completed by the descent of the Holy Ghost, which put the crown to the Redeemer's glorious work in behalf of man. Another will be that by which his followers were influenced afterwards, as members of this new covenant now perfected. Accordingly the former will be found to prevail in the Gospels, the latter in the Epistles. The former, of course (from the generality which its comparative indistinctness induces), will be purely ethical; while the latter (from the individuality impressed by its clearness) will appeal to feelings and to facts. This distinction, obvious as it is, has not been sufficiently attended to, and its neglect has led to much laxity of opinion. For many persons, and more especially the moral philosophers, to whose views upon their subject it was very suitable, have, naturally enough, though very inconsiderately, fixed upon that great concentrated body of moral instruction, contained in our Lord's sermon on the Mount; and conceiving that passage, as coming from his own lips, to contain (if any can) the Christian doctrine, have been led to regard the Gospel too much in the light of a system of ethics. So striking is the difference, that some infidels (not caring to ascertain

the real state of the case) have not scrupled to assert that Christianity, as it came from its Author's mouth, was a mere moral system, and that this was corrupted immediately after his death by his apostles, more particularly by St. Paul. The comparison of a very few passages, will be sufficient for our purpose.

In his sermon on the Mount, our Saviour says, "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven," (LUKE vi. 37). Here is a moral precept, appealing indeed to the revealed doctrine of God's forgiveness, and deriving its obligation from the promise of this, and from the authority of its deliverer, as being sent from God. But let us seek for this same precept in the Epistles. There St. Paul bids the Colossians to "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, forgiving one another, if any one have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (COLOSS. iii. 13). Here all is grounded upon Christ crucified. His cross is the rule, the motive, and the obligation. Again, in the same sermon, our Lord thus lays down the duty of charity: "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." (MATT. v. 42). Here is a moral precept, enforced as before. Let us also again turn to the Epistles. In urging the Corinthians to contribute to the necessities of the

saints, St. Paul thus lays down the grounds of their duty: "for ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." (2 Cor. viii. 9). Again we are referred to Christ crucified. Let one more example suffice. Our Lord, enforcing the duty of humility upon his disciples, says, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke xiv. 11). But how does his Apostle, he who gloried in nought save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world was crucified unto him, and he unto the world,—how does this his faithful soldier and servant exhort to the same duty? He thus charges the Philippians: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient even unto death, even the death of the Cross. Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue

should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (PHILIPP. ii. 7, &c.). Never before was such an appeal made to the heart of man. It stirs it with the thrilling strain of the trumpet. The humble man is raised from the dust, and set amidst angels. To what beggarly elements, to what wretched offscourings do we return, upon resuming the principles of the moralists. We seem hurled down from heaven to earth.

Thus we find in Scripture a moral system, based upon revelation, and not concocted by human reason; confirmed by our Lord himself, addressed to believers in repentance, in a redemption, in a life to come,—we find this in the very same volume (owing to the peculiarity of the circumstances), practically superseded by one, which rests upon the fact and doctrine of Christ crucified. What then shall we think, not only of the pretension, not only of the inutility, but of the mischievous and anti-christian tendency of those systems which we have been discussing? To the logician they are contemptible: to the Christian they are abominable.*

* I heartily wish that our University, which, according to her solemn prayer, sets so much value on sound learning and religious education, would consider how much she promotes either one or the other, by employing Paley's Moral Philosophy as a book of education.

We have now traced the peculiar bearing of this grand fundamental doctrine upon our moral duties, both as presenting a rule of life, and as supplying a motive of obligation. In effecting these objects, however, it accomplishes a third, in which it is quite singular. It at the same time furnishes an example,—an example, too, of a most peculiar influence. In the case of every thing which admits of degrees, our imagination can always go on to pourtray something of higher excellence still, until at length we obtain and fix in the mind's eye, an ideal model of perfection. It is the constant contemplation of this model which leads us from one stage of improvement to another, and ever with our advance advances also; always at our head, beyond our grasp, and unattainable. In this lies the source of all excellence: the poet and the painter, for instance, work after a model thus conceived in their own bosoms, but never to be realized by their lips or their hand; and therefore often regard their own production with a sigh, while it excites the admiration of surrounding crowds. In the same way we can form in our minds a model of moral excellence, unattainable by imperfect human nature; and some writers have drawn fictitious characters to embody their notions, and supply to coarser and less tutored minds, that spur to virtuous emulation, which they themselves find within their

own bosoms. But, after all, the real effect produced is slight. Men turn away from the impalpable, unpractical model, listless, wearied, and incredulous. Now the system which rests upon Christ crucified, is not only a system of precept and doctrine, but also an aggregate of facts; and we are presented in our Lord, as man, with a real substantial being, the model of all excellence; one which surpasses every thing which our bosoms could have framed in their highest aspirations. Great indeed is the advantage of an example. We are in morals, after all, but little children: we are too careless to enter into long detail,—too ignorant to sum it up, and gather all its bearings. We require, therefore, a sensible picture, which shall present at one glance what must otherwise be conveyed in long and minute description. Thus we can inform ourselves at once upon the very brink of action into which we are so continually hurried, with but a few moments to spend upon preparatory reflection. Still even this is but a limited and most inadequate view of the benefits of Christ's example;—it were thus like the glorious firmament on high, to which, however we may gaze upon it, we can never make any sensible approach. But the facts which gave us this example, gave us also our redemption; they procured for us grace to do, as

well as showed what we ought to do; they advanced us to a point whither of ourselves we could never have arrived, and which being unattained, the excellence of that example cannot be understood: vain had been the example of his patience, gentleness, meekness, charity, if the sufferings which called it forth had but operated thus passively, and not actively by God's will affected our souls. Taken in this twofold view, how inestimably precious is his example; how does it try and search our hearts; how does it stir our affections, while at the same time it enlightens our understanding, and chastens and exalts our imagination. But see still farther the wonderful goodness of God. He has not left us to the promise of grace to enable us to follow up this example, but hath poured it out so as to exemplify in men like ourselves its efficacy: besides the great example of our Lord moving like a sun through the region of Scripture, we are presented in the train of his followers with innumerable lesser lights, borrowing from him, amd reflecting to us. All these are attainable, and they are manifest proofs to us of the fulfilment of God's gracious promises in the restoration of our fallen nature: there we see the weakness of the flesh converted into the strength of the Spirit; there we see exemplified the conquering might of Christ crucified; thence we can

joyfully gather how the perfect new man may hereafter grow out of our sinful nature; these are our ancestors in the church of Christ: to their pictures we may look up; with the memory of their deeds nourish our courage; and, by imitating them, prove ourselves worthy descendants of the spiritual conquerors of the world. One point remains upon which it is necessary to bestow a brief notice, inasmuch as it supplies the ground upon which the authors of the modern moral philosophy have advanced the utility of their systems, and contended that Scripture does not dispense with them.

It has often been remarked, and by some objected, that Scripture, considered as a rule of life, omits some important duties,—as, for example, friendship and love of country. The objection is much more apparent than real, and goes in effect no farther than to say, that these abstract terms do not occur there. We may with nearly as good reason blame the highly national Greek, or the staunch Roman, because they have no single abstract term perfectly expressing our word patriotism. Scripture, as teaching not on professed system, but indirectly, by means of facts, and expressions called forth by facts, is on that account no great dealer in abstract terms. But let the above terms be resolved into their elements (and our practise must always

so resolve them), and every part is immediately met by Scripture. Thus, with regard to what is implied in the duty of friendship, is there no command to be kindly affectionate to one another, in honour preferring one another; none to bear with one another; none to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with them that do weep? has our Saviour left no such act on record, among those which marked his earthly sojourn; does his intercourse with Lazarus supply no example; and are there few elements of this duty to be derived by him who is engaged in the daily contemplation of the Son of God, offering himself upon the Cross for his redemption? The fact is, that Scripture inculcates a far deeper, a much more holy and permanent feeling than such as is implied in friendship, which is included as the less in the greater, and it sums all up in a single term, unknown (in this sense) in moral systems, brotherly-love (Philadelphia). It has been said also, and truly said, that Scripture sometimes attaches blessings or curses to duties or offences which it has never defined: that covenant-breakers, for instance, are denounced, but the nature of a covenant not explained. This is the very strongest example that could have been chosen; a word of more awful import does not occur in Scripture; it states the most affecting relation in which man

stands to God, it raises up immediately before his mind a series of the grandest and most moving events which have occurred upon earth. Scripture, in fact, presupposes a state of society in which such duties are necessary, and such terms current. But since their common acceptation in society may seem too undefined for all cases of application, to what source shall we refer for their strict definition. We must evidently have recourse to the light of nature, which Scripture presupposes; and not, by betaking ourselves to a mixture of the light of nature with that of the Gospel, commit Scripture in the absurdity of presupposing its own Revelation.

Practically speaking, there will be little necessity even for this. In practice, men are seldom curious to investigate the bounds of duty except with a lurking notion of transgressing them: when they anxiously discuss the limits of obedience, they are on the borders of rebellion; when of patriotism, on the brink of treason; when of friendship, on the verge of treachery.

Thus it has been endeavoured to shew the nature of the doctrine of Christ crucified, as bearing upon those duties, which the moralists assume as their province. In the course of this investigation, there has surely appeared no inclination to undervalue and decry the usefulness of moral philosophy: so far

from it, that an acquaintance with the study, as based upon the mere light of nature, has been expressly stated at the outset to be essential to the character of the Christian scholar,—of the well-appointed defender of his faith. But to those systems, which, by borrowing a truth, and not the whole truth, from Revelation, obscure the light of nature, at the same time that they stain the purity of the Gospel, to them it is freely confessed that an equal deference has not been paid. Nor can he who addresses you sufficiently express, even in the most earnest terms of deprecation, his full sense and dread of their baneful effects. Alas! what they are too well calculated to produce, requires no additional encouragement. By the corrupt infirmities of our nature, we are already but too well disposed to dwell slightly upon the great doctrine of Christ crucified, to have recourse to any other base than this for a rule of life, and, like the wilful leper, to prefer Abanah and Pharphar to all the waters of Israel. From long habit also, and careless enjoyment, we are disposed to mistake an indulgence for a right, and thus to deem of revealed doctrines,—such as the life everlasting,—as primary inherent principles in our nature. Add to this general tendency vices, which impel many men on such a forgetfulness of our Saviour's Cross, weaknesses which

incline almost all. Our indolence is gratified by thinking to rest upon this one single fact of a future state, without being compelled to go through the long and awakening detail by which Scripture conducts us: our vanity looks complacently at the dignity of future glory, but turns away from the humiliating rebuke of the atonement: our love of enjoyment gazes with delight on the prospect of the happiness to come, but shrinks from the energy, the self-denial and mortification, held forth from the Cross of Christ. Thus all our corrupt nature tends with the whole of its bias this way; and shall education be called in to confirm it?

O let us not err ourselves, nor lead others into error: to the Christian the life to come is no abstract idea, which can be bandied about in heartless selfish calculation; it is a crowd of ideas, awful and vast, bidding defiance to the management of the puny mind of man. It is no single, detached fact, which *will* happen, against which we are to provide: it is one of a series, the far greater part of which *has* happened, and is affecting us at this moment. It is no simple element which may amuse the head: it combines a throng of emotions to stir the heart. Its contemplation cannot be taken up by any one at his pleasure; habitual earnestness alone has this privilege: and when taken up it requires effort to

maintain as we should. For it requires to be maintained by studious reading of God's word; by frequent meditation on the intervention between God and man there detailed; and by continual prayer,—that searcher of the spirit, and opener of the heart.

Nothing is so dangerous as to render this doctrine familiar to the mind, divested of its Gospel accompaniments; and the Christian who has once brought himself to hold it steadily in view without including Christ crucified, has in that moment virtually denied the Lord who bought him, reckoned his blood common blood, crucified Christ afresh. Let the cold calculator be told that it is Christ crucified which alone enables him or gives him any right to look onward to the reward of another life: it is this alone (and not human precept) which can sustain his feet in this world, amid the shock of daily conflict; and to this alone (and to no help of human reason) when wounded by the great adversary, can he look up, as to its brazen type of old, and be healed. Here alone lie all his means of grace; here alone are seated all his hopes of glory. A celebrated father* of the church, in remarking on the accomplishment of these words of the Prophet, "and his rest shall be glorious," says, in his fanciful manner, "the very form

* Chrysostom, Vol. I. p. 569. Ed. Benedict.

of his death is more glorious than a diadem. Therefore kings, putting off the diadem, take up the Cross, the symbol of his death: on the purple the Cross, on diadems the Cross, in prayers the Cross, on arms the Cross, on the holy table the Cross, and in every quarter of the world the Cross shines more glorious than the sun." What in his days was fast quitting the heart, and taking its place among the baubles of outside show, degenerating into the sign of a wretched superstition, let us, in accordance with purer times, resume spiritually in our bosoms. When we rise, the Cross: when we lie down, the Cross: in our thoughts, the Cross: in our studies, the Cross: in our conversation, the Cross: everywhere, and at every time, the Cross, shining more glorious than the sun. Yea! Let this, in our warfare below, become our sign, and in this we shall conquer.

# SERMON XV.

## ON THE COMPARATIVE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE EARLIER AND LATER CHURCH.

---

EPHES. v. 15, 16.

*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

---

THE literal sense of the phrase "redeeming the time," in this passage, and in one parallel in the parallel Epistle to the Colossians, has been variously interpreted. It is quite sufficient for the present purpose to gather the general import of the text, which appears to be, that the Ephesians should direct their course of life with all wisdom and discernment, full of the knowledge of the will of God, so as to be enabled to distinguish the opportunities which he presents, and to turn them to proper account, accompanied and confused as they are with the numerous impediments to godliness, created by evil times.

That the days are evil, has been the warning cry of every period of the church until now, no less

under Christian than under Heathen governments: for to every period has been assigned some peculiar trial of the godliness of its members. It has sometimes been sounded forth in notes of encouragement to resist; sometimes in the voice of most earnest deprecation to forbear; according as it has at one time appeared in the shape of violent persecution, as it did to the Ephesians, and the rest of the primitive church, or, at another, assumed the less repulsive but not less dangerous form of imposing prosperity. This cry may be louder at different times; but yet, as Christ has promised to his church to be with it to the end of the world, as he has promised to every two or three met together to be in the midst of them, as he has promised to each individual a sufficiency of grace, and that he shall not be tempted beyond what he can bear, but that a way to escape shall be made for him; it must be concluded, that any peculiar disadvantage under which this or that period may seem to labour, is balanced also by some peculiar advantage, and that none has occasion for superior boast or complaint. However unequal the ways of man, the ways of God are equal.

It is now proposed to examine this point by taking two extreme periods, the earlier and later times of the Christian church. Such a comparison must, if anything can, be decisive of the question, since two

periods could not be selected, more contrasted. They are as opposite as nearness and distance,—as danger and security,—as wonders and commonplace.

The first thing which strikes the enquirer on approaching this investigation, is the apparently unqualified superiority of the earlier period, shewn in its possession of miraculous powers; and at these a wistful eye is often cast by persons who, not having taken due pains to lay a sure ground of faith, are troubled with difficulties and fits of scepticism, and cry out for signs and wonders, that they might believe: and again, by those also who, disheartened at their own want of energy, finding it so far below the point to which they are conscious it should attain, wish for the supernatural spur which operated upon the minds of the early Christians.

A nearer inspection will reduce this superiority to the level of our own times. For with regard to the exhibition of miracles, so much coveted, it ought to be borne in mind that they acted no farther, in the first instance, than as challenges of the attention of the witness to the doctrine promulgated by the worker. That doctrine was still to be investigated, for the miracle may proceed from a good or evil source (MATT. xii. 24), and therefore it was that the Beræans, in the most fruitful period of these extraordinary interpositions of divine power,

when the wondrous works of the apostles were sounding in their ears, and displaying before their eyes, tried the spirits whether they were of God; searching the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. The question, therefore, is reduced to this,—1. Is there now an equally importunate challenge? 2. Are there equal means of investigation?

1. The first question is quickly resolved.

When a miracle was exhibited before the eyes of the ancient heathen, it by no means necessarily roused his attention to a proper pitch of curiosity. Prejudice was active, subterfuges had been invented, and he could stifle all tendency to further investigation, by ascribing it to magic, or the powers ordinarily claimed by the wonder workers of the day. To behold and to proceed in enquiry, demanded sincerity of heart, unconquerable love of truth, a fortitude to abide the consequences of conviction, which were by no means doubtful or desirable. Hence even of the beholders the number of converts was comparatively small, and were of that little band (how little, alas! in every stage of society,) who dared to see with their own eyes, and act upon the dictates of their own breasts.

But it was not to every convert that a miracle was exhibited; and where there was a single link of evidence interposed, the above indisposing causes

would operate with tenfold influence. The interval was equivalent to the whole series of evidence interposed between those days and ours; and if he did not follow up immediately the call upon his attention, all trace was soon lost: the Christian was met but here and there, came and went, and was quickly lost sight of amid the predominance of the Pagan world. On the contrary, the unbeliever of these days must divest himself of first-instilled principles, and absolutely make his escape from society, yea, even from the face of inanimate nature, studded as it is with monuments of Christianity, if he would avoid the incessant solicitation of the Gospel of Christ. Assuredly it would be ridiculous for the modern even to hint at any disadvantage here.

2. With regard to the means of research, the modern may murmur at the nearness of source to the ancients,—at its distance from himself: may complain that he has to trace up a long course of evidence, extending through many ages: that while he dips his scoop in the stream, he has not in immediate sight the cleaving arm and the yawning rock to assure him of its miraculous source. How justifiable such a complaint may be, will appear from a very brief parallel of their respective means of evidence, and motives to enter faithfully upon it. To the one is presented the church of Christ, young,

insignificant, and scattered; but concentrated with surpassing power, upon every point, however detached, by its possession of miraculous powers: to the other, the church established for ages, universally diffused, strong in connexion with the bonds of society, but gifted only with the ordinary powers of the spirit. To the one, the records of faith, not always at hand to peruse, not always perhaps collected into one body, but cotemporary with his own days, or not long prior: to the other, everywhere at hand, gathered into one volume universally acknowledged, but of a date long prior to his own times. To the one, an acquaintance with a despised people and a barbarous literature: to the other, all that has been in association in his mind with good and admirable from his cradle. To the one a brief examination, with little leisure and much peril: to the other a long review, with ample leisure and unbounded security. With regard to motive, the one had every reason to desist, where the other had every reason to begin. Where the convert looked around for others to keep him in countenance, he saw them sprinkled here and there, the offscourings, scoff, and derision of the world; the food of the axe, the stake and the amphitheatre: while the other beholds all the civilized tribes of earth,—the wise and the good, princes and their people, challenging him to their example, and

crying out unto him, in freedom and not in bonds, to be even such as they.

In reply to the more reasonable demand of the other, who covets the moral effect of the miracles of the early church in stirring up the energies to holy action, we may first assert generally, that the ancient, not having been nursed up from his cradle in the faith, may reasonably expect a more powerful excitement, and that what was lost in time should be made up in intensity: we should also take into the account the overwhelming trials to which he was exposed. If, however, it be answered, as it may, that such trials have occurred in later periods without any corresponding supernatural help, then (to omit the remark, that the extraordinary gifts at that period bestowed were not so much designed for the assistance of individuals, as necessary to the very existence of the church, and have accordingly been withdrawn, since it has ceased to be a scattered and helpless body,) we may confidently assert, that the desired moral effect still resides with the church, in its documents, the Holy Scriptures; to which, if a person diligently apply, and open his heart, he cannot but imbibe the effect, which is not the less abiding for not being communicated by immediate impulse. In fact, the distance at which he views the wondrous dealings of God in olden times, is com-

pensated by their being presented, not detached, as they must have been to the spectator; but coming before his mind in one harmonious series, converging to one purpose, not to the benefit of this or that individual or particular church,—as they might have appeared when they took place,—but to the support and glory of the universal church; to the comfort and encouragement of its members throughout all lands, and all ages, to the end of the world. O yes! even to us at the present day, if we but give our hearts and minds their due exercise in their most glorious province, and draw nigh with them and commune with Him, to whom a thousand years are as a day, and generations but a span long, the effect of those wondrous works comes down through ages undiminished. Even to us the dumb speaks, the withered arm glows with life, the leper drops his polluting scales,—the lame walk, the blind see, the dead arise.

To say nothing of individual experience, we have convincing proof of this from public and well known facts, for in what instance have the modern martyrs fallen beneath the ancient? Their bodily sufferings could scarcely be less, their spiritual trial certainly more severe, as it was administered by false brethren, and not by avowed unbelievers. Mighty, indeed, is the power of the word of God, when read diligently

and earnestly, as if it were the voice of our Saviour speaking to us, searching our thoughts, and rousing our affections; but it comes with incalculable force in the hour of trouble, which shuts out all help and comfort from without, and compels us to the only place of refuge, the throne of God, established in our own bosoms by long and unwearied edification of his Gospel.

Thus far with regard to the most obvious appearance of unequal distribution of advantages to the members of the earlier and later church. A less prominent, but certainly not less important, subject of comparison, is the nature of those daily and ordinary opportunities, which the Christian is to distinguish, and to separate from their accompanying impediments, and turn to the account of godliness.

Christ in his holy church has assigned to every one his proper station. All is ordained of him, even to the very door-keepers of his house, the lowest of his holy priesthood. And as he has openly appointed some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, with their respective spheres of duty; so has he also, not less really, though from the nature of the thing less visibly, determined the place and duties of all those for whose edification they were appointed: and most grievously will the layman mistake, if he

thinks that all his thoughts and actions are to be less directed towards the honour and glory of the great head and glorious body to which he belongs, than the lives of those who occupy, as doctors in his church, a more definite place. If his exertions be from his station less conspicuous, they must not be less substantial; from every one God requires the whole of his services, which he must duly render, keeping watch with his eye by day, and his ear by night. From the moment that the Christian awakes each day, to that in which his Master kindly lays him down again, he is encountered by a perpetual throng of circumstances,—in which he must distinguish good from evil, extracting from them the opportunity which God presents, and surmounting the impediments with which it may be clogged. He must not think to despise the slightness of the occasion: were it, in his Lord's own words, but to give a cup of cold water, it must not be passed by. For it comes immediately from his hands, it is afforded as a means of stirring up, and calling out into practice the grace which is in him; of exercising his spiritual strength, of trying his discernment; and is the forerunner of another, which its omission will render more difficult, both of being distinguished and arrested. Unemployed it is irrevocable; misemployed it is pernicious. Such opportunities are

too apt to be estimated by the effects which they produce around us; which may often be trifling, and not upon us, which can never be unimportant, oftener than we think, most momentous. Thus at every step and turn, the Christian has some call upon him to separate good from evil; to choose the one, and eschew the other, diligently distinguishing the work of the Lord from the business of the world.

Applying these considerations to the case before us, it must be allowed that the state of prosperity and security, by which the present period of the church differs from the earlier, especially from that in which the Apostle addressed the Ephesians, makes the discernment of God's opportunities more difficult. We are not mingled with the heathen side by side, the contrast of whose darkness would bring them before us in a stronger light; they are of the colour of all around,—lie hid in the multiplicity of similar shapes. It is Christian society all around us. At the same time, however, we are delivered from the dangerous infection of the heathen's example, which, while it threw some things forward in a stronger light, offered too convenient a shade for others. Again, not to dwell upon the unwillingness of exertion produced by such a state, prosperity mingles evil with good in so subtle an union, throws

such an equalizing gloss on the face of things, and renders, also, by the compact condition of society which accompanies it, relations so complicated, that a steady and acute discernment is necessary to distinguish what is wholesome from what is unwholesome. Whereas in times of affliction, where society is broken up, those relations are narrow and simple; the opportunity to be arrested is of greater dimensions, comes in a pronounced and distinct form, set out in all the contrast of light and shade. But then it comes accompanied with circumstances of terror and dismay, sufficient to quell any heart which has not prepared itself to undergo the extreme of suffering. While in the other case, the person raises around him but a ring or two of waves of trouble upon the calm surface of society, and all is still as before. Besides, this latter has had more leisure to form and give an edge to his discernment; he has been all along used to the minute shades by which circumstances around him are distinguished, and the calm and security with which God hath blessed him, will indeed have been abused, if it shall not have been employed in maturing the faculties which he has given him, with a view to their improvement. Steadiness of view, patience of observation, and a quick discernment of minute differences, are the qualities which his state is required to

produce. But supposing the opportunity equally discerned by each party, it may now be contended that it is not with us presented in company with those distinct and energetic motives to action, which enforced its application in earlier times. It is true that in our days of peace, society moves but sluggishly in answer to any impression. The effect, therefore, does not so immediately follow; there are certain stages in the operation, and hence also we have often a series of motives to go through, before we arrive at the final which determines. We are, moreover, naturally reluctant to disturb the calm surface around us by any unusual exertion. Whereas in the other case, the effect would more immediately follow, and society was already in derangement. But we have most ample compensation in this, that our declining of such opportunities is not so immediately fatal. There is a train of them, and in the space allowed us between the neglect of the first, and a fall from the faith, we may relieve ourselves by arresting another. But there was presented at once the dreadful final alternative—"Christ or no Christ,"—and the opportunity once passed, gave him over to a reprobate mind, accused him of apostacy, bade him curse God, and die. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, says (vi. 4), "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and

have tasted of the heavenly gift; and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing that they crucify unto themselves the son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." Any wilful sin was certain, in those days of persecution, to draw that of apostacy with it; the above passage, therefore, would excite no remark upon its uncompromising severity. Yet how alarming is its tone to the reader of the present day; conscious of wilful sin, how dreadful does he find his situation, and how disproportionate does he think the consequences to the offence: but how relieved he feels at once from all his terrors, when he has discovered it is the sin of apostacy which is thus terribly denounced; and how careful modern commentators are to assure him of this. We have in this fact a strong proof of the happiness of our lot in these later days.

We might proceed to a long extent in comparing the circumstances of the two periods; but sufficient perhaps has been already stated, and it may be enough to observe in brief, that then physical courage was rather called into action,—now moral: then danger was rather the object of dread,—now opinion: then man was combated rather face to face,—now he is entrapped by a net for the feet. The tempter then

had more recourse to brute force,—now he insinuates. On these and similar points we should still find advantage and disadvantage equally distributed to the two periods, and that God's ways are equal; it is ours that are unequal.

We are not, therefore, in the least behind our predecessors in the church of Christ on this consideration: we have equal means with the Ephesians of redeeming the time, since the days are evil. And having ascertained the peculiar character of our times, let us become sensible to the imposing necessity of turning it to its proper account; of using the leisure and security which we are enjoying to the cultivation of the faculties with which God has blessed us; to bring them, in a time so favourable, to that degree of ripeness, that we may in every case distinguish the occasions presented by our master, of serving him to the honour and glory of his name. There are also not a few errors, peculiar to this our state, against which we have to guard; and one or two of these I shall now proceed to describe.

When alarmed at the uncontemplated result of any action, men are apt to fly for consolation to the consciousness of having done it with the best and purest intentions. Now this would be a reasonable resource for one who, as in the times of ancient persecution, lived from day to day with his life on the edge of the

sword; who, in jeopardy every hour, had little time to balance consequences, and therefore trusted in God for supplying his deficiency of foresight, provided the feeling upon which he acted were right. But it will furnish no excuse for us of this our period. The great searcher of all hearts has for us another interrogation to put. "Has due advantage been taken of the leisure and security afforded in my church, to form that conscience aright? The volume containing my will has never been violently plucked out of your hands; so comparatively regular is the train of events, that scarcely one might not have been provided against by a mind zealous of obedience; your meditations have been unbroken from without. What excuse then can you plead for being taken by surprise at any moment, and being obliged to act blindfold upon the crude and hasty dictates of an uninformed conscience?" Let us anticipate in our own hearts this solemn interrogation, and judge ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord.

If mere conscience (not considering whether it be informed or not, according to the means afforded), be sufficient to sanctify any act, how soon would the will of our master become a dead letter, since he that knows much, and he that knows little, may then do equally good service. How unnecessarily urgent would seem the Apostle's injunction "to be vigilant,

to be sober, to be understanding what the will of the Lord is." Why need we think of the advice, "to examine our ownselves, prove our ownselves, know our ownselves?" Why should we take heed to the warning of the prophet, who tells us that "the heart is deceitful above all things?" Why to the command "to make the best of the talents committed to our charge," of which the knowledge of God's will is the most precious, for he has not made us mere creatures of impulse? Assuredly the heart which has not been strictly trained up, and informed by diligent comparison with God's holy word and commandments,—which has not had its motives continually and jealously questioned, nor been checked here, spurned there, disciplined everywhere, will, when suddenly called forth, carry into action some interested motive, some unworthy affection, which the emergency of the moment allows it not leisure to sift and expel. When too late they make their appearance, overwhelm with shame and confusion, and discourage in future from the very best and safest undertakings.

If in this period we are called upon for a higher exertion of our faculties, we have also to guard more against that abuse of them, which, like the weed to the plant, is so apt to spring up with them, and choke or distort their growth. One of these, beyond

all others, requires a constant curb from the sober and vigilant Christian; and the more so, perhaps, in proportion to the cultivation of his mind,—and that is the imagination. Beyond number, indeed, and beyond weight, are the evils to which its abuse may give birth: one only, however, concerns the subject now in hand.

In those early days of the church, to which so much reference has been made, the real and deeply contrasted events with which they were engaged, the numerous perils with which they were beset around, the frequent calls to come forward and do or suffer, utterly prevented them from attending to its delusions. But in a period of leisure and security, like ours, it is drawn upon to supply as it may that excitement, and administer to that novelty which is so natural to man. This it is which, above all, blinds the mind's sight to the occasions presented by the hand of God. They are not sufficiently striking, forsooth, they are associated with commonplace, and the detail of ordinary life; they are tricked out in none of those brilliant colours with which it has invested the day of proof and trial; they are therefore carelessly passed by,—another comes, and still another, but neither is it yet the time. He reserves himself for a day of his own choosing, and not of God's offering; he looks for-

ward in his carnal mind to some theatrical exhibition of his faith; and the future confessor, amid his lofty speculation, is overthrown and brought to the ground by the slightest and the most despised of daily incidents: for the value of any excitement of mind where this power alone is concerned,—for the reality of his zeal, his love, his faith, and all on which he builds, I would refer him to no unsubstantial vision, but an actual scene which shortly preceded the death of our blessed Lord. Of all that immense crowd which, with waving boughs of palm, and loud hosannas, were conducting him through the streets of Jerusalem over their strewn garments, in triumph to his temple, how many, but a few days after, interfered to save him from the Cross? how many did not surround that Cross with mockings and revilings?

Shall the opportunity then set before his eyes, serve at best but as a key note to a strain of idle dreaming, and unprofitable speculation? Yet, to use the words of the lawgiver, it is not hidden from him, neither is it afar off: it is not in heaven nor beyond the sea, but it is nigh unto him that he may do it. O, never let the healthy activity of practice yield to a morbid habit of speculation; hurtful as the effects of such an exchange will be, they will not stop at mere neglect of opportunities, but go on to undermine the foundations of religious faith,

which can continue pure in doctrine, and vital in practice, only by resolutely casting off all self-conceived notions; by bringing the imagination in strict subjection to the sober tenor of Scripture, by giving up the heart in all simplicity, and the mind in concentrated attention upon its facts and doctrines, and by seeking diligently every occasion to put the grace of God into practical effect.

When our blessed Saviour was anointed by Mary with a most costly unguent, a murmur was vented against her by the man who was on the point of betraying him, because she had not rather sold it, and distributed the money to the poor. Our Lord approved of Mary's act, he accepted it as the last pious office of a nearest and dearest friend, who had thus anointed his body for burial. By this approval, he has given us indeed a strong admonition how we should employ every occasion of showing towards him our entire devotion and love; for that occasion is offered by himself, in that he is peculiarly present. We are not to turn away, as his betrayer, and the tempter of that betrayer would persuade us, and shut up our heart; substituting for the lively reality a crowd of beings of neither time nor place, who can neither feel nor be felt for. Thus entering into a ruinous barter, by which we may think to make compensation for our neglect of God's work,

by the greater good which we imagine ourselves to be pursuing, and proceeding in regular course from sins of omission to those of commission. What indeed were this but a mental idolatry, what but to turn from the face of the living God and address ourselves to the work of our own hands; rather let us pour upon him, now that he is with us, the whole treasure of our exertions, and fill the house of his presence with its perfume. Whatever the future may be, however brilliant, however important, let us remember that, by God's ordinance, the present is the only door to it; and if in our hasty presumption we leap over the wall, we alight without the fold of God, and not within it.

In that fold, in his holy and blessed Church, we have been gathered by Christ, having been bought with a price, even with his own precious blood, and are his servants to do his will, and not to seek our own. We are to keep a vigilant look out for the opportunities peculiar to the several stations which he has assigned us; and these, if attended to, are sufficient to crowd our sphere of duty to fulness. In arrogating a wider range, we are assuming a power which he has not accorded us, and with a barren ambition overlooking what he has put legitimately into our grasp. There, in that calling in

which he hath called us, is his presence chamber; there is his holy place, in which only he will accept our offerings; there is the Zion of the living God, where if we be not found, we are bowing before the calves at Bethel. If our own experience happily has not taught us, let us learn from the warning voice of others, that if there be one circumstance which more than another embitters a retrospect, it is the view of unemployed opportunities: they have glided by perhaps with slight impression, and carelessly noticed; but, like those bowmen of old, are terrible when past, dealing behind them wounds of remorse and shame:—then their despiser, in amazement, beholds the number which he has permitted to pass by, and sees them blocking up against him that point to which they were tending, and might have conducted him. And that is some blessing from which he now finds himself for ever excluded; some honourable sphere perhaps of usefulness, never now to be gained; some service in his Heavenly Master's house on earth, replete with heart-filling and exalted duties which is now unattainable: and finding that fortune, upon which he has been drawing like a thoughtless spendthrift, entirely empty of its treasures, sits down, bankrupt in hope, and bemoaning his folly in vain.

Can he complain that those opportunities came to him not sufficiently distinct for his apprehension? This is but to admit that he was deficient in vigilance. His Heavenly Master gave him ample notice of their passage, for all were accompanied with some change of body or mind, or the things without; with gain or with loss; with joy or with sorrow; with warning or with invitation, which might have awakened all but the determinedly reckless. And by their proper disposal he might have obtained the gift of still greater, and seen in their giver an unfailing author of good, to whom he could look up with confidence in the hour of need; an object of faithful though imperfect services, whom he could regard with the sure and certain hope of his reward; an indulgent and long-suffering Lord, who would often be content to take the will for the deed. But now, alas, the contrast! He sees in that giver a kind master neglected and disobeyed; a friend who had even given his life for him empty-handed and unrequited; a witness whose testimony shall reach his most secret and perverse ways; and a judge with whom there shall be no favour.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Oh! as he hath given us the light through his Holy Spirit, may he continue it unto us, nor may we by

recklessness of life give him cause to take it away. May we thus be enabled with all discernment to redeem the time, with grace to order all our works to his honour and glory, and offer to him in our souls and our bodies a continual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

# SERMON XVI.

## ON THE FORTUNES OF THE CHURCH.

LUKE, xxi. 28.

*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.*

THROUGH all varieties of climes, of tongues, of laws, of customs,—through all alternations of barbarism and civilization,—through all migrations of people, changes of empire, and confusion of the tribes of mankind,—through all these impediments the church of God has come down to us uninterrupted and triumphant, and uninterrupted and triumphant (our Saviour has informed us) it shall proceed to the end. But as in looking back upon its history we see it often engaged in a desperate conflict, sometimes brought even to death's door, so in looking forward we must expect to find a similar state of things, to see her still militant against the world, and the world still warring upon her; nor are we left to reasonable expectation alone. Our Lord and his Apostles have assured us that such will be her condition, and have

even shadowed forth in words of prophecy some of the most important trials which she is still destined to undergo.

Perhaps at no period of the world has the face of the Christian church presented a more interesting appearance than at the present day. A long period of calm and security is past, and a period of most foreboding aspect is coming on. Superstition and infidelity, which combined their powers against her in her infancy, are once again in open league. Wherever we cast our eyes they are met with churches tottering, and creeds insulted. But it was amid the fearful signs which proclaimed and accompanied the overthrow of what had been a portion of God's church, that our blessed Lord bade his disciples to look up, and lift up their heads, for that their redemption drew nigh. May not then the spiritual man derive a similar comfort from similar signs? Certain it is, that a careful reader of the history of the church will find, that the ruin of any portion of it has led to the extension of its dominion in other quarters, and with a purer creed. A connected series of events is readily traced between the lamentable fall of the eastern church, and the spread of the Gospel over the western hemisphere. And, in every case, assured as we are of the duration of the body, we can regard the visitations, which afflict

its individual members, as the operations of the master of the vineyard; who is lopping off dead branches, removing choking weeds and overshadowing shrubs, and pruning even his choicest vines; thus baring them to the fostering breath of his spirit, and to the ripening sun of his Gospel. So that here, even where we ourselves are sufferers, still may we look up, and rejoice that our redemption draweth nigh. Yea, even should our own particular vine be shorn to the ground; yet, as long as the root remains, we may comfort ourselves with confidently looking forward to its shortly putting forth its branches with redoubled vigour and fruitfulness. That, in the darkest and most perplexing times, we may quote these words of our Lord with joyful hope, will appear from considering that by a law, resulting from the very nature of the church, a period of affliction will usher in one of triumph.

The church is a society taken out from the slavery of the world, and brought together into the liberty of the Gospel. Did it, therefore, consist but of perfect members, it were removed beyond all influence of this world for good or for evil; the world would not have a single tie or hold upon them, but all being free in the spirit, would be unassailable by any chance or change affecting the flesh. But its members are all in different stages towards perfection,

very many far remote from it. They are still liable, therefore, to the chains of the world, and the whole, as a body, subject to temporal accidents. The world reduces men into its slavery either by compulsion or by seduction; that is, by persecution or by temporal prosperity. These two modes we will briefly consider. No son of man can be so disengaged from the world as not severely to feel, however he may withstand, the power of persecution. Every man will join with the holy Zacharias in the expression, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve our God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. For at such a time, not only is his outer man afflicted by constraint put upon his means of worship, by his constancy being every moment put to the proof by the threats of the sword of the magistrate, and sometimes tried almost to exhaustion by incessant watchfulness and resistance; but his inward man is grieved for the honour and glory of God before men. His holy church is shut up in a beleagured city; neither her armies nor ambassadors can go forth; her numbers are daily thinned by apostacy, her provisions are run short by the hindrance given to the word. Help us, he cries with the Psalmist, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: O deliver us and be merciful unto our sins, for thy name's sake.

Wherefore do the heathen say, where is now their God. But no affliction, however severe, can be superior to the comfort which the church can administer, for that comfort was ordained to quell the very head of all affliction, the loss of bliss and innocence. And the church is then peculiarly in her vocation when her consolation is most needed; then all her treasures are opened and poured forth, and, as worldly sorrows deepen, her spiritual bounties become more prodigal, their measure ever keeping far in advance of the quantity of affliction which called them forth; to hunger, and nakedness, and the sword, she opposes the spiritual banquet of the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, the robes of righteousness and everlasting glory, the life without end in the world to come. These glorious promises, which seemed afar off amid worldly security and enjoyment, are now brought close to the sufferer's eyes, and amid the most fearful signs he may look up, and lift up his head, for his redemption draweth nigh.

The church of God is too strong for the world; she is ever one and the same; her members are united by an unvarying, undying principle, which is faith in the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus. But worldly society is never in one stay, it has no abiding principle to keep it together, day by day

very many far remote from it. They are still liable, therefore, to the chains of the world, and the whole, as a body, subject to temporal accidents. The world reduces men into its slavery either by compulsion or by seduction; that is, by persecution or by temporal prosperity. These two modes we will briefly consider. No son of man can be so disengaged from the world as not severely to feel, however he may withstand, the power of persecution. Every man will join with the holy Zacharias in the expression, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve our God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. For at such a time, not only is his outer man afflicted by constraint put upon his means of worship, by his constancy being every moment put to the proof by the threats of the sword of the magistrate, and sometimes tried almost to exhaustion by incessant watchfulness and resistance; but his inward man is grieved for the honour and glory of God before men. His holy church is shut up in a beleagured city; neither her armies nor ambassadors can go forth; her numbers are daily thinned by apostacy, her provisions are run short by the hindrance given to the word. Help us, he cries with the Psalmist, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: O deliver us and be merciful unto our sins, for thy name's sake.

Wherefore do the heathen say, where is now their God. But no affliction, however severe, can be superior to the comfort which the church can administer, for that comfort was ordained to quell the very head of all affliction, the loss of bliss and innocence. And the church is then peculiarly in her vocation when her consolation is most needed; then all her treasures are opened and poured forth, and, as worldly sorrows deepen, her spiritual bounties become more prodigal, their measure ever keeping far in advance of the quantity of affliction which called them forth; to hunger, and nakedness, and the sword, she opposes the spiritual banquet of the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, the robes of righteousness and everlasting glory, the life without end in the world to come. These glorious promises, which seemed afar off amid worldly security and enjoyment, are now brought close to the sufferer's eyes, and amid the most fearful signs he may look up, and lift up his head, for his redemption draweth nigh.

The church of God is too strong for the world; she is ever one and the same; her members are united by an unvarying, undying principle, which is faith in the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus. But worldly society is never in one stay, it has no abiding principle to keep it together, day by day

it is changing manners, morals, and institutions. What wonder then, if, with all its kingdoms, and principalities, and powers, it has been compelled to desist from its fierce attacks; if monarchies in ancient times, and republics in modern, have been unable to maintain the persecution which they had begun: the weakness of God has overcome the strength of man. It is at this moment, when persecution has but lately ceased, that the visible church is seen in all its beauty; the storm, however it might have ruffled her leaves, has refreshed her root, her main trunk shoots its branches anew, and she puts on double beauty for all her former uncomeliness. Her withered leaves, her rotten boughs, have been carried away by the violence of the tempest. Now she is reaping the reward of her sufferings, now is come the redemption to which she looked through the veil of her afflictions. But after a brief interval the world renews its attacks, and in a different manner; the high courage which she has shown, the splendid victory which she has gained, the stability which she has disclosed, draw the admiring gaze of men upon her, and gain attention to her doctrines; generous and candid minds are won over to her faith, every day she extends the curtains of her tent. But now that all is peace, now that she and the world are not openly and bodily at issue, the world-

lings flock in, and with them the thoughts, the affections, and the passions of the world. The world now seduces her members into its slavery; and much more dangerous is this mode of its attack, inasmuch as the apostates which it makes do not go out from the church, and relieve the labouring vessel of a heavy and useless cargo, as in time of persecution; but remain within, where their false doctrine eateth as doth a canker: hence heresies, seditions, strife, with all their train of evil; society civil and religious is disturbed, and at length broken up; calamity regains its turn.

If we look at the state of the church throughout the civilized world, we cannot but be persuaded that it is close upon one of these critical alternations; the calm and smooth water is nearly passed through, and our ears can now distinctly hear the noise of the waves, and our eyes discern the foam of the breakers; distress of nations is coming on with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring: if ever there was a time which called for reflection and humiliation, it is the present. These may, immediately, through God's acceptance and blessing, and mediately through the moral effects, which by the laws of his governance they produce, work a salutary change, and soften, if not avert the impending chastisement. Let us, therefore, take a brief review

of the responsibility under which seasons of prosperity lay both nations and individuals, as component parts of the universal church of God.

One of the most grievous mistakes of the present day, and one which assuredly will reap tenfold retribution, is the supposition that it is unnecessary for a nation which is composed of members calling themselves Christians, to assume a positive Christian character: that, while every individual is bound, as a servant of Christ, to seek in all things the promotion of his honour and glory, yet their joint and concentrated efforts, which are the acts of government of the country, need have no reference whatever to this result: such a supposition either implies a contradiction, or something much worse. The very opposite to it is that which must present itself to a truly Christian mind. A nation of men which profess Christ, must also profess Christ, and with the same distinctness; it must openly shew the sign of the cross; and vain are all its counsels which are not directed to the glory of God as their final object: the course of the affairs of this world ever has and ever will be directed by God towards the coming of his kingdom. This way tends the great stream of earthly events, and the counsels of a people, which follow this direction, can have no obstacle: they will be borne steadily along to a successful end. But

such as go not with this stream, will shortly be dashed to pieces and overwhelmed by the strength of the current; the former will bring happiness and honour, and the latter will meet with defeat and shame. To seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, is no less the duty and policy of the nation than of each of its citizens; and demoralization, with its certain succession of intestine commotion, and foreign subjugation, is sooner or later the certain reward of every people which neglects this prime commandment of our Saviour.

But if we consider a nation of Christians not only with reference to its internal polity, and external communication with other nations of Christians, but also with reference to the heathen nations with which God's providence, preparing his kingdom, has brought it into contact, great indeed is its responsibility: so much the greater still on account of the very small number to whom he has granted such an opportunity of doing his service: a number so small, that it implies an election to the purpose, an ordination to the office. That nation has been made peculiarly his priesthood, to preach his word to the heathen; and if that nation be at the same time at the very summit of prosperity and civilization, then has God also entrusted to it, as to a preacher of his Gospel, powers of similar efficacy to that of miracles

which he shed upon his early preachers; for the gift of working miracles was withdrawn, was in fact superseded, as soon as the church became a compact and influential body, so as to force its principles on the attention of the heathen. And when Christianity became the religion of the civilized world, so effectual a substitute was this civilization, that even the conquering barbarian heathen adopted the religion of the conquered Christian. By such an engine were all the modern nations of Europe converted; shall they then be excused if they neglect any opportunity of doing the same towards their fellowmen, who still lie in darkness and the shadow of death? The engine which has been committed to the hands of our nation is more powerful still than this. For we appear among the Heathen as conquerors. We have been furnished with the most forcible means of drawing their notice towards the Gospel of Christ. And if we take proper means to show them that to that Gospel we owe our superiority; if the Cross of Christ, every where displayed, inscribed on our banners, waving over our victorious palaces, proclaim that great is the Lord God of England; if our religion be seen marching with our hosts, like the tabernacle of God, among our captains, and not our camp followers, shining like the Urim and Thummim on the breasts of our counsellors and

rulers; if it be embodied to their eyes in an organized, publicly acknowledged, and sufficiently numerous ministry, can the effects be calculated? Has God placed such means in the hands of any nation since the world began? The conquering empires, which he has hitherto employed to further his kingdom upon earth, have been brute unconscious agents, which knew no more of him, and of his counsels, than the saw or the axe does of the mind of him that handles and employs them. But our nation has had imparted to it the life of the Gospel,—has had revealed to it his gracious purpose of salvation, his will that the Gospel should be preached to every creature. By the peculiar position in which he has placed it, he has clearly intimated to it that it should "go teach all nations." May it so answer the call, that he may say also, "I am with thee to the end of the world." That this call has not been answered hitherto in any degree corresponding to its pointedness, to its urgency, to the gifts on which it presumes, must be confessed with shame and confusion of face; and in every national humiliation. Hither the heart of the true penitent for national sins will turn, and find the burthen of his song of lamentation: here he will find his chief cause of fearfulness and trembling. For he will

reflect that God makes the adversity of nations to minister to his purposes, no less than their prosperity. The temporal loss of Israel was the spiritual gain of the world. He was broken in pieces like a potter's vessel, and his scattered sons were made God's preachers among the Heathen, to prepare the way of the Prince of Peace. By a reverse operation God concentrated the barbarians upon the falling Roman empire, and thus brought them within the sound of his Gospel. Surely this is a most awful consideration to a nation so preeminently gifted by God for doing him service, as ours has been. Surely it is possible, it is but too probable, that if we have neglected to yield this service out of the abundance of our prosperity, then he will wring it out of the straightness of our adversity: if we have refused to be conscious agents, then he will turn us into unconscious tools of his purposes.

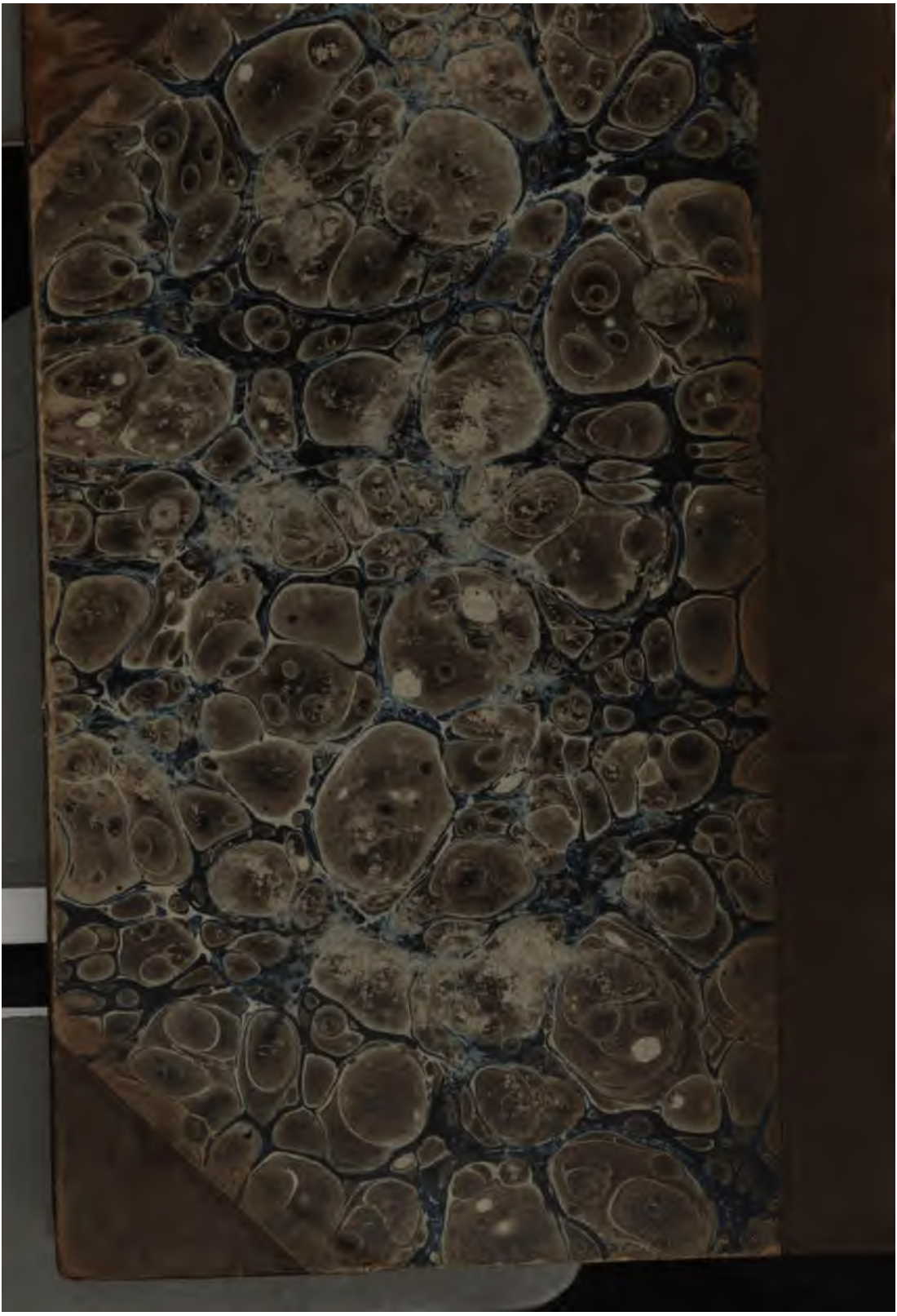
To all this, and anxiety with regard to the sentence which God may pronounce upon his nation, the individual has to add the fearful sense of his own responsibility. A sincere feeling of humiliation, a true knowledge of the principles of the gospel, will remind the best of men, that, sinner as he is, he must have contributed a share to the national sinfulness, on which fearful visitation seems fast descending. Then,

as one who sees his own sin, not only in himself, but confronting him by reflection also from others, he begins the work of examination and self-rebuke. Then it is that a dreary list of sins of omission and commission is presented to the perusal of his mind. He then sees opportunities, which he, in common with his countrymen, had received, and in common with them had neglected. Then he perceives how different might have been the face presented by the Church of Christ, had all employed them. And then it is that the approaching period of darkness and constraint discovers to him, by its appalling contrast, how inadequately he has put to account the hours of calm and leisure which have hitherto been his blessed portion; how much opportunity he had of preparing his spirit for the conflict, by the study and practice of God's word; of weaning affections, which must now be rudely torn from the breast; of conquering, step by step, the stripling power of the world, which now, grown suddenly to a giant's might, demands of him to decide the struggle, once for all, at one combat. All these reflections rise up before his mind, and accuse him before the throne of God; and mournfully he remembers his Master's warning to "watch, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son

of Man cometh." He will prostrate himself with all contrition and confusion of face, and implore forgiveness. There is none that doeth good, no not one, will be the confession of the true penitent, on a day of national humiliation. But having thus explored his heart, and opened it before God, he will, with God's grace, gird up his loins, put on the whole armour of light, and prepare to meet his trial with a fixed resolution and unperplexed conscience. And then when the fearful signs begin to take place, when wars and commotions shall be heard, when nations and kingdoms shall be shaken; when there shall be distress of nations, and failing of men's hearts for fear; when the abomination of desolation shall be standing in the holy place,—he will look up and lift up his head, for his redemption is at hand, the kingdom of God draweth nigh. Sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. The storm is ushering in a glorious day, and between its gusts he can overhear the tinkling of the trowel of the angelic masons rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. If his body perish in the storm, then hath the kingdom of heaven arrived to him indeed; he has obtained his everlasting rest and citizenship there. If it survive, then are his eyes blessed with the sight of the purified Church of God, shining like

gold from the furnace. The vineyard of the Lord lies before him, expanded in more than its former loveliness. The unsightly and noxious weeds have been removed, its hedge has been repaired, its wine-press, its lake, and tutelary shed, have been replaced anew. Therefore, whichever lot betide him, he will look up, lift up his head, for his redemption draweth nigh.

FINIS.

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS, BOUVERIE STREET.

*Page* 82.—The Reader is desired to correct an oversight here: in line 8, for *two first* read *three*, and in line 16, after *resembles*, insert, *that which ensues after*.